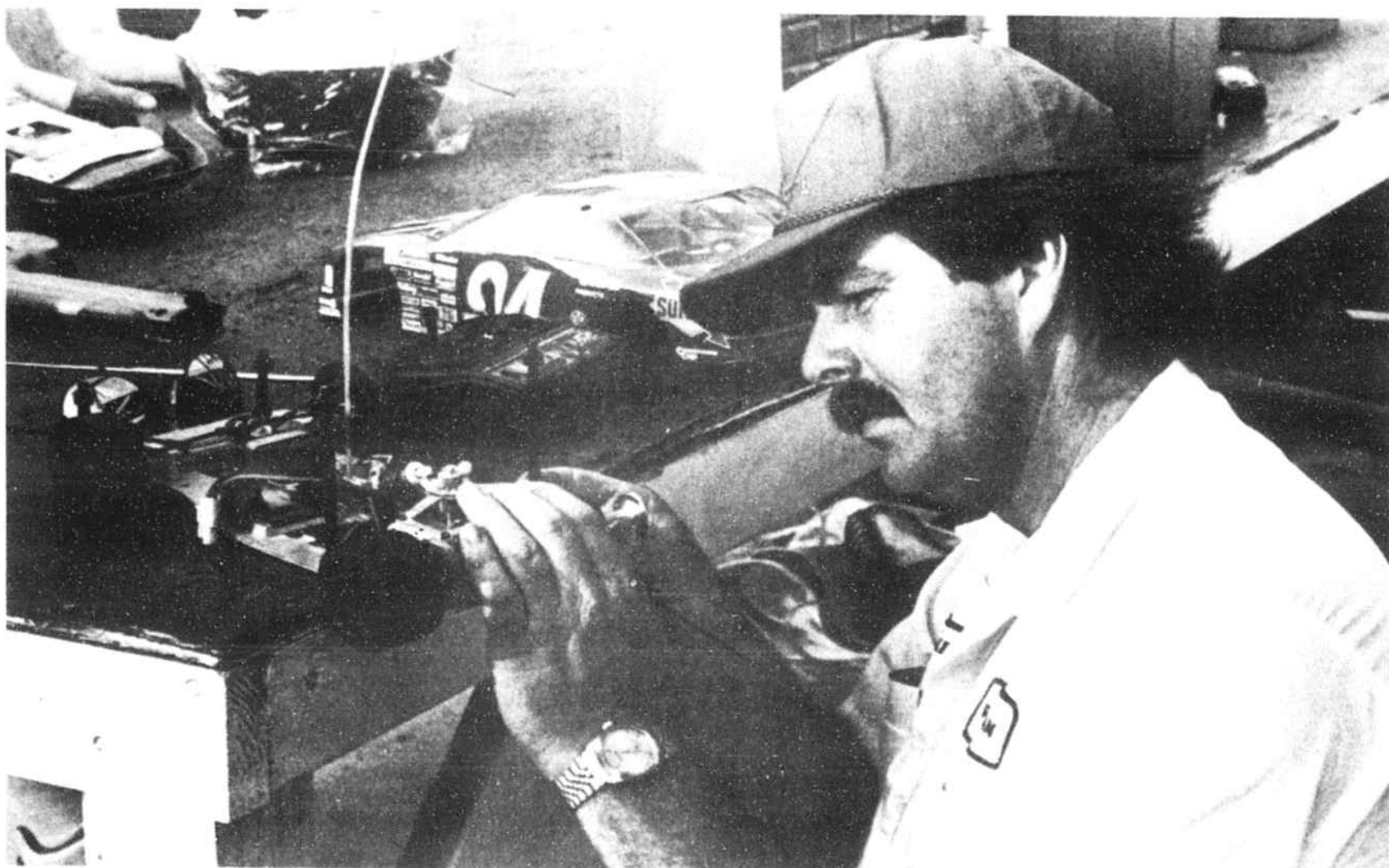


VETERAN DRIVER Doug Alsbrooks keeps a close eye on his car and both hands on the controls.



WILLIAM SMITH makes some final adjustments to his car before the race.

STAFF PHOTOS BY DOUG RUTTER

Gentlemen, Start Your Engines!

Local Racing Club Finds Big Fun In Small Packages

BY DOUG RUTTER

Ask racing fans about their favorite places and they're liable to list Darlington, Rockingham, Talladega or Daytona Beach. Not many will mention Grissetown, unless you're talking with one of the 20 members of the Southern R/C Motorsports club.

This group of race fans meets every other Sunday in an isolated, wooded area south of Shallotte. They talk about racing. They argue about racing. But most importantly, they race.

They race tiny, remote control cars that buzz around a concrete oval track at the speed of sound. Well, maybe not quite that fast. But they move fast enough to keep these grown men entertained for hours on end.

To keep the racing fair, everybody drives the same type of remote control car, something called an RC-10L Associated. They look just like the cars you see burning rubber every year at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

"Everybody has the same thing so it's competitive," said Doug Alsbrooks, one of the original members of the club that formed four years ago. "Nobody has an advantage. It's all setting up the car and racing skills."

Two years ago, the club built a racing oval on property in the Grissetown area owned by club member Kenny Holden's family. It's 306 feet around the center of the track.

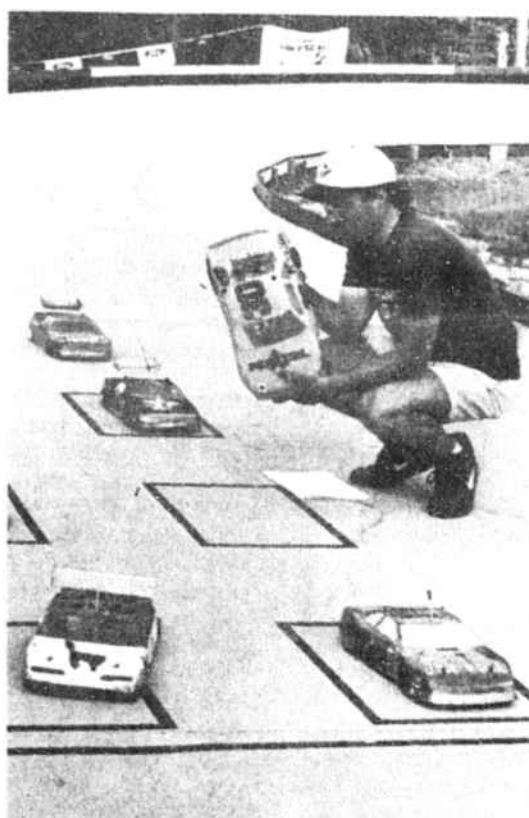
A typical lap only lasts about seven seconds, so the club uses a computer system to help keep track of laps each race and points that are accumulated during the course of the season.

"We've come a long way," says William Smith, a founding member of the club. "When we first walked out here it looked just like that," he said, pointing to tall pines and underbrush surrounding the track.

Southern R/C Motorsports boasts much more than a racing oval tucked in the woods off Highway 17. Checkered flags and banners that circle the track create an atmosphere for racing.

There are lights for night racing, and a wooden platform overlooking the track where the drivers stand during the races. There's even a set of bleachers for spectators.

Frankie Stephens, the club's first president, is



KENNY HOLDEN lines up the competitors for a wild ride. Qualifying times are used to determine positions. The True Value car grabbed the pole in this heat.

also among the group that has helped hold the club together over the years.

Asked what keeps him coming back to the track every other weekend for more racing, Stephens replied, "Stupidity...dedication really."

"A bunch of us get together and act like young'uns. We get together and argue and help each other and argue some more. Basically, it's a lot of good, clean fun."

When the club first formed, one of the first rules it set was no alcoholic beverages at the races. The rule remains sacred to the club. "We

want to keep it to where you can bring your wife out or your girlfriend," Stephens said.

Some of the club's members have vastly different backgrounds. There are county natives and transplants (Yankees). The one common bond is that every member is a race fan.

"We all got people we pull for on the track, so we basically got that in common," Stephens explains.

When it comes to race fans, there aren't many more dedicated than Lynn Gause. "I've been a big race fan my whole life. I like to see things run fast. I love racing, love it to death."

As far as Gause is concerned, there isn't anyone on the track today that can compare to the legendary Richard Petty. "I've been pulling for him ever since I was a little kid."

Gause's remote control car has the number 43 plastered across the hood, just like the car driven for years and years by his racing idol, King Richard.

Gause has seen the club change a lot from its early days when the guys gathered on weekends to race cars around orange traffic cones in the Waccamaw Elementary School parking lot.

"I think we have come a long way. I'm tickled with the club. I didn't ever think we'd get something like this," he says of the concrete oval with banked corners and lights. "It's like being in a dream."

Club members admit that their hobby (some consider it a sport) can be expensive. "A top-of-the-line car will run you around \$500. You could get in it for \$300," Alsbrooks said.

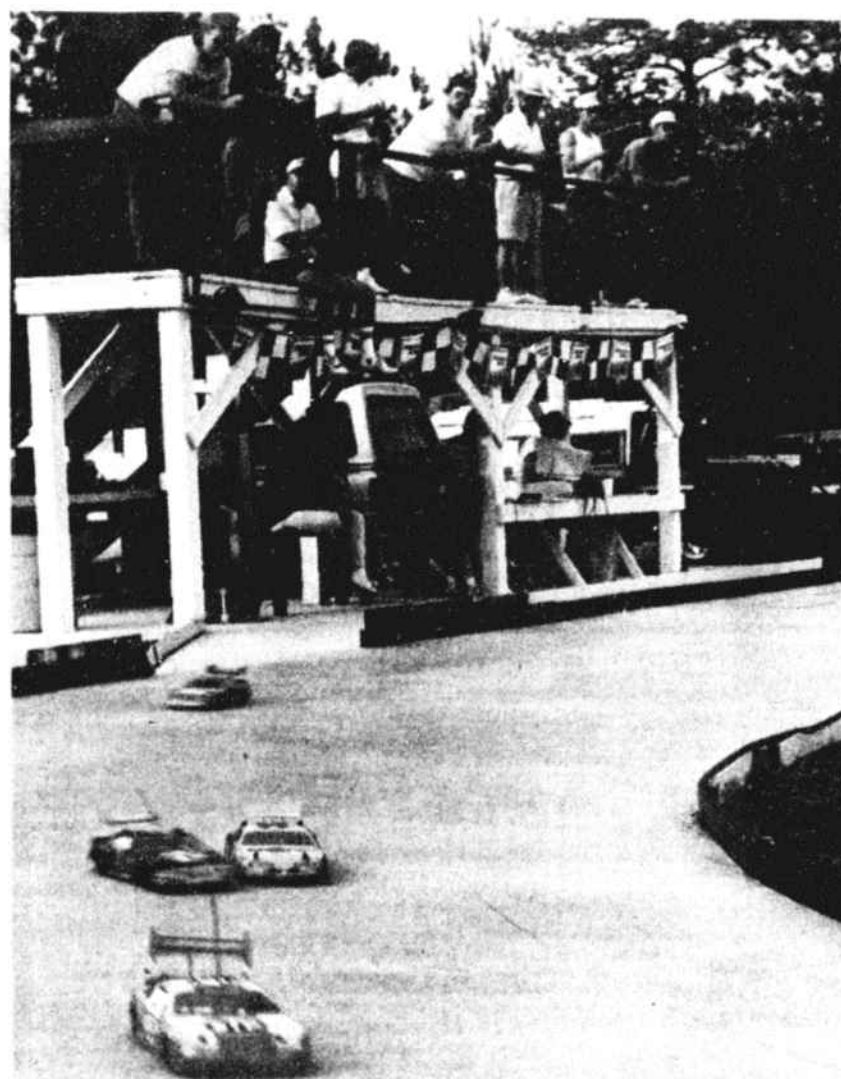
"It's not a hobby for the faint-hearted when it comes to expenses," Stephens adds. "You can have a lot of fun if you're willing to put some money in it. I don't know how many thousands I got in it—close to four or five. A lot of that was experimenting."

Club members pay \$20 per month in dues to pay for track maintenance, the light bill and other expenses. Accidents on the track are common, and the club helps pay for parts that need to be replaced.

"We're hoping to expand the track too," Alsbrooks says. "That's probably a year or two away, but that's our plan anyway."



THE KIDDING AROUND ends when the racing starts. Drivers must remain focused to be competitive in this club.



THE RACE CARS head into turn one as the drivers look on from an elevated platform that offers a great view of the entire track.



THE SUNOCO OLDSMOBILE, complete with driver, is a good example of the realistic cars used by the club.