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# RACING

60c

AUGUST 1970

## Hamilton Wins at Talladega

Exclusive Interview

## BUDDY BAKER TELLS IT LIKE IT IS AT

## MPH



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*Right—Buddy Baker breaks up watching the contestants slam, bang and bounce around the Daytona FasTrack course during 1970 Speedweek. Dave Underwood photo.*

## SCR Staff Report

ON MARCH 24, 1970, BUDDY BAKER became the first man in history to average better than 200 miles per hour on a speedway. Others have been doing it for years in a straight line, but never before has anyone done it on a closed circuit. It was accomplished at Alabama International Motor Speedway, Talladega, Alabama, using a Dodge Charger Daytona. The car was the pale blue #88 owned by the Chrysler Corporation and known as "the Chrysler Test Car." On this particular run, Chrysler engineers served as the pit crew. Even though the car is owned by Chrysler and is serviced by their people, the car is still fully legal under NASCAR Grand National specifications. Although the car has never raced, it qualified in the Fall of 1969 for the first Talladega 500 with Charlie Glotzbach at the wheel. At that time Glotzbach set a new record of 199.466 mph.

Another #88 raced later in the 1969 season with Richard Brickhouse as driver, but this #88 was a Nichels Engineering car.

The purpose of Baker's trip to Talladega on March 24th was to conduct engineering tests in transmission durability for Chrysler. There were indications that Baker would be knocking on the door of the magic 200 mile per hour barrier; so, Joe Epton, the official NASCAR

Chief Timer and Scorer was on hand with the timing equipment.

After waiting for the track to dry out from a morning rain, Baker went to work turning test laps. On the 30th try, his speed was 200.096 mph! He was called in and the rejoicing spread throughout the length and breadth of Talladega.

Later in the afternoon, Buddy went out to test again. Larry Rathgeb, Chrysler engineer told him, "Just get out there and give us some good, hard steady laps and forget about racing. You've already got your record, so now help me get my test done. Then we'll all go fishing."

Baker may or may not have been complying with his instructions, but he had soon turned in another lap at 200.330 mph, and then another at 200.447! That's the record, and it will stand at least until the qualifying for the Talladega 500 on August 23rd.

Whether the record stands or not, Buddy Baker has something that no one can ever take away from him. He was the first man to break the 200 mile per hour mark.

Here are his feelings about the situation as well as his personal feelings about a number of other aspects of auto racing in this exclusive SCR interview conducted at the close of the second day of qualifying for the Alabama 500 this past Spring.

# BUDDY BAKER: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

**SCR:** Buddy, can you feel the difference between 190 and 200 miles per hour without being told by the speedometer or the pit board that you are actually going that fast?

**BAKER:** Well, there is definitely a different sensation in running a 200 miles per hour lap and a 190, but the way you drive the car is actually very much the same. Cars are real streamlined now, and they go into the corners real smooth, and at 190 you put just as much effort in driving the race car as you do at 200. The only thing different is going into the corners you feel a little more down pressure on your body, but other than that, it's very much the same.

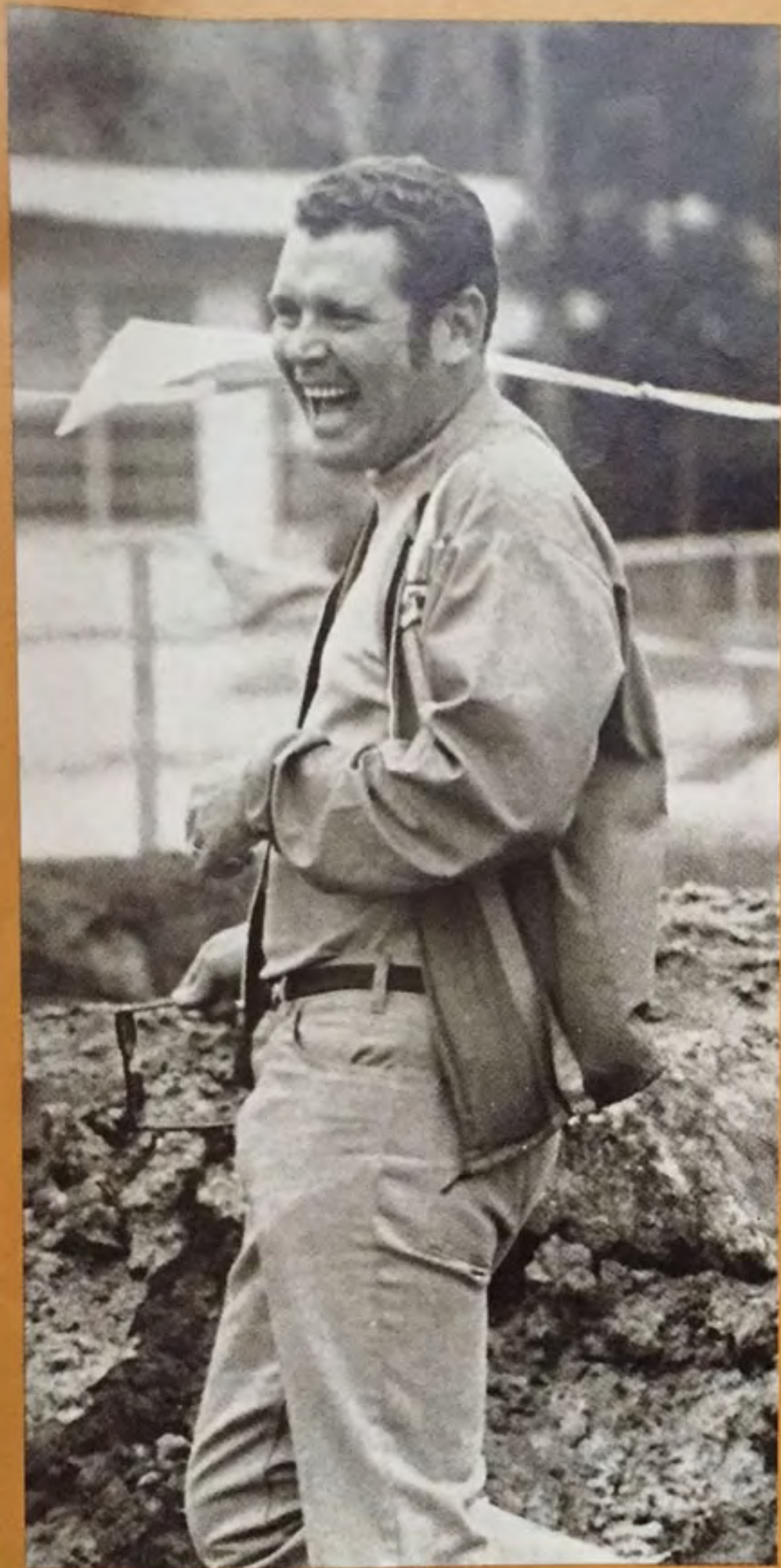
**SCR:** Would you say that your emotions lean more to-

ward joy and excitement than to fear or apprehension at 200 miles per hour?

**BAKER:** Well, first of all, it's a little hard to explain my theory on racing, but I really like what I'm doing, and the day that racing really starts scaring me, then I think I ought to start leaning more toward being a family man and staying at home on the weekends instead of trying to drive a race car at 230 miles an hour down the straightaway. I think that a man . . . if you are involved heavily enough in what's happening to your equipment, you don't have the time to sit there and worry about anything because once you leave out of the pit road, you become an instrument just like your race car is, and you have to function right along with

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that car. A guy that's sitting there with half of his mind on whether he's afraid or not cannot drive a race car here or anywhere else.

**SCR:** What are the actual physical sensations of a 200 mile per hour ride? How do you feel physically different?

**BAKER:** Well, that's a "durn" good question. The only thing that I could actually say is different is the tenseness of going into the corner . . . like we came here from Atlanta, Georgia, and we have been running 160 miles an hour there . . . just how fast you come up on the corner . . . right at first, here, you tighten up on the wheel and use a little more of your physical strength than you need, and you over-steer quite a bit. As you run longer, you adjust yourself to what you're doing, and you calm

right on down, and then when you smooth up, it's just like sitting in your easy chair at home.

**SCR:** Have you had any trouble focusing your eyes in going through the turns at these speeds?

**BAKER:** No, but I get awful hungry about five o'clock in the evening.

**SCR:** We get the message, but this won't take long. Do you have any sensation of dizziness?

**BAKER:** Not as yet. Last year I heard some of the drivers were complaining about chest pains. When I ran the test down here in March, I tightened the shoulder harnesses too tight and bruised my shoulders up pretty good. Actually, the race track is not what it was last year to begin with because it has been smoothed some . . . it's still rough, but it's smoothed some. I don't think the conditions will ever be duplicated again to what we had last year. We really had a stinker of a problem last year. I understand it all worked out because it's really bad for racing when anything like last year happens; nobody in the world could say which was what last year . . . I'm just glad everything is back to normal because this is the one thing I really enjoy doing.

**SCR:** At what point, Buddy, does running at Talladega feel different from running at all the other super-speedways or perhaps Daytona which is most comparable to Talladega?

**BAKER:** Well, first of all, Talladega is like no other race track in the world. It's probably the easiest to drive of any race track I have ever been on in my life. The only place that you really have to know what you are doing is when you're drafting another car; you've got to be very careful because you are running fast enough that if you get the car half sideways, there's no telling where you'd end up; so you try to keep complete control over your car, and it takes a lot of mental training to sit there and think of every move you're going to make and just be aware of everything that the car's doing. Any little thing, any little noise or anything else could mean whether you make it back around to the pit area or not . . . just like this week, I heard a little squealing noise in the back of the car, and the right rear wheel was touching the top part of the inner panel. Had I not been aware of what was going on in my car and knew it wasn't supposed to do that, it could have been a disaster later on . . . really, after the race got started it could really put you in serious trouble; so being familiar with your car and conditions which you're running under and having some training is a definite advantage of running here.

**SCR:** Why do you say this track is the easiest to drive?

**BAKER:** Well, first of all, you get a tremendous amount of down pressure in the corners . . . the car really sticks; it doesn't slide like in Daytona; you can go through the corner in one lane. It's real easy to drive, kind of like on a super-highway, a lot easier than a curvy country road, but if you ever have an accident on that super-highway, you will wish you had that wreck on that little teeny road, because you are running fast here, very fast, and at any time you could get yourself in big trouble.

**SCR:** When you say Talladega is the easiest track you've ever driven, are you including Michigan with its 22 degree banks?

**BAKER:** Well, I think the bank is definitely the only reason I said Talladega is easier to run than any other race track, because Michigan and Texas both are very smooth, very easy to drive, but nothing like Talladega. Talladega is actually a rougher race track, but the darn thing just works beautiful in the corners where, because of the high bank, the car doesn't seem to wash around with you; so, it makes it a lot easier to drive.



**SCR:** During a race at Talladega when a pack of cars are running at these speeds, do you foresee any problems with air turbulence?

**BAKER:** Well, I really don't because my car felt better today than I've felt a car at any time on a major speedway, and I think that the reason for this is that now we have taken some of the streamlining away from these cars by removing the windows. Instead of the car running through the air like an arrow and turbulence getting to it, I think that it's controllable forces we're dealing with now. Before the car cut through the wind; the wind ran smooth down the sides, and if that air ever got disturbed at all, it would make a car swerve a little. Now this air doesn't know where to go . . . it's going in and out where the side glasses used to be and all up the front, tumbling around; it just doesn't have any effect on you because you are disturbing the air so much and not penetrating like you were before.

**SCR:** Then, with the windows out of the car, it's actually going to help the racing situation here.

**BAKER:** I think so. At first I raised as much Cain as any driver on the circuit because, first of all, I usually do anyhow when a new thing comes out, and I'm not sure whether it will work or not. I couldn't imagine running 200 miles an hour anywhere with no windows in the car. It didn't make sense; the first thing you do in your road car when you hit the freeway is roll up your windows, and I figured without windows it's just going to be impossible to really drive the car and make sure it's going where you want it to, but it didn't work out that way, and I'm the first to admit I was wrong on it.

**SCR:** Then, Buddy, in the world record run that you made and in the practicing and qualifying that you've done here today, you're saying that you had no undue physical feelings from the G-forces or the speed or anything that is physically much different than running the other race tracks?

**BAKER:** No, not really, I think last week in Atlanta the race track was just as rough as here. I don't think I've heard anyone mention anything about being uncomfortable or tire problems or anything else. All I can see is the green flag.

**SCR:** When the time comes that all cars are capable of

sustaining speeds of 200 and up mile per hour racing, what are your feelings in regards to a large percentage of professional drivers being able to handle the cars at those speeds?

**BAKER:** Well, I think any man that loves racing can train himself to drive a race car at any speed. If we had a car right now that all the suspension and all the tires and every aspect of what it takes to make a first class race car were together, I don't think we'd have any trouble at all running 250 miles an hour here. When the time comes, the engineering features of everything involved will be so far advanced that a driver will be able to drive the cars at those speeds. I certainly do not feel that I am to my limit.

**SCR:** When you set the world's record here of 200.447 you were using the same No. 88 car that Charlie Glotzbach set the record with here last fall. You used the same kind of tires that are here in use today. Is that correct?

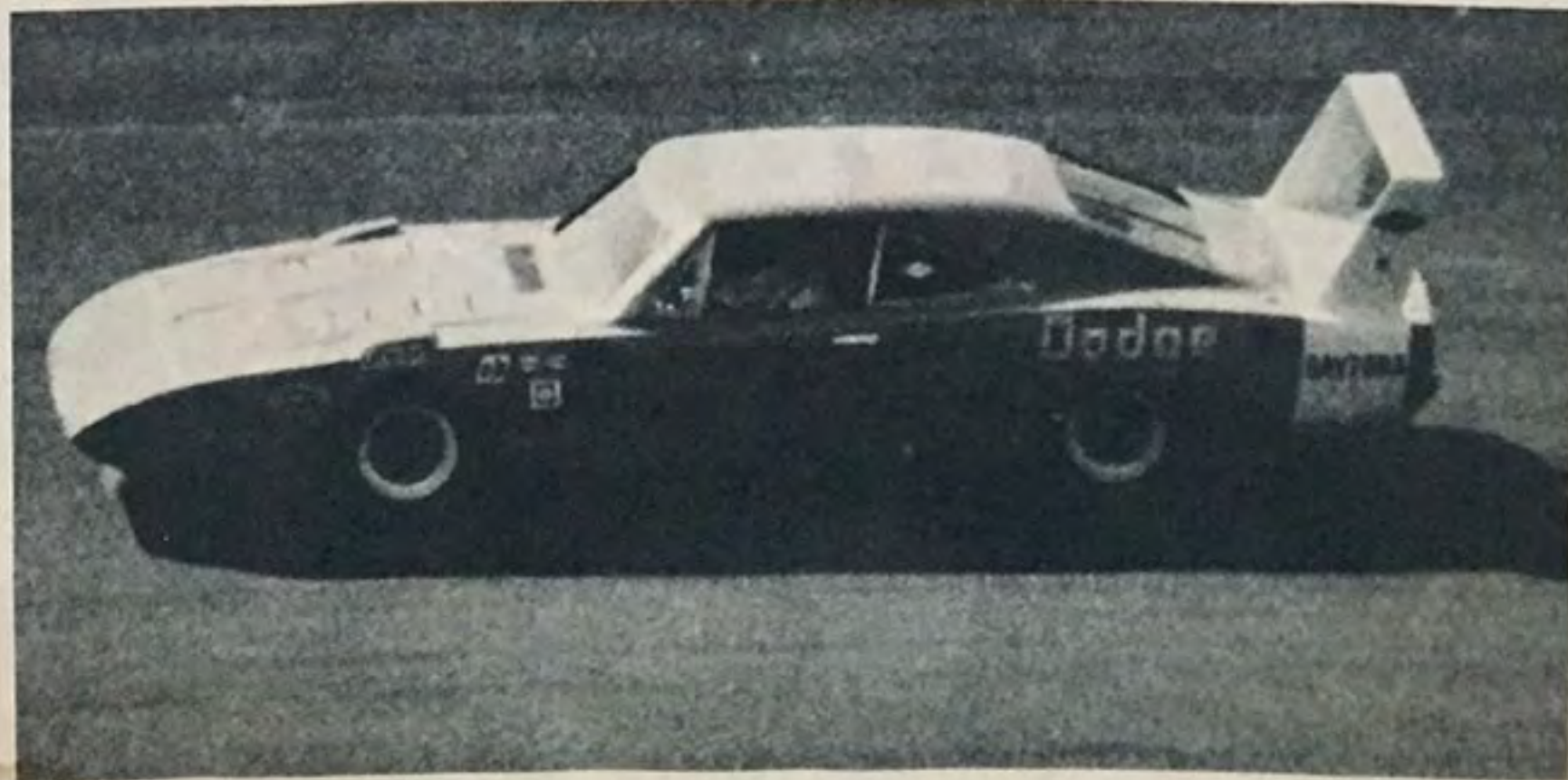
**BAKER:** Well, very much the same. I don't know very much about what tire we had. With the tire we had last year you could get a good bite on the race track, but Goodyear has had a lot of time to develop a tire that wouldn't throw the center part of the tread off like it did last year. They always do a tremendous job of building what I say is a perfect tire, and . . . well, Goodyear's just made the difference in whether we could even run here or not. They have got a tire that is suitable to race here, and I'm real happy about that.

**SCR:** When you made that world record run, were your windows up or down?

**BAKER:** They were up, and I think that if I had windows in my car today when I was drafting out there that we would probably have run somewhere around 230 miles an hour, but the one thing that surprised me and changed my feelings toward the way I've made predictions about how the race track would feel without windows . . . it really changed today because my car actually handled better today with the windows out than my car did in Daytona with the windows in it.

**SCR:** What changes do you think will need to be made in the equipment and the car for continued performance in the 200 and up mile per hour range?

## **BUDDY BAKER: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**





**BAKER:** Well, for one thing, every bolt on the car will be safety wired, double checked, and triple checked. Tomorrow during the race (ARCA qualifier for VULCAN 500), we will not see very much of the race at all because we will go from the front bumper to the rear to make sure that every possible thing that we can check is checked. Anything that looks like it's worn or anything will be replaced with a new part because it's going to take a supreme automobile to run this race. I'm sure that the pressure that we're putting on these cars in the corner and all will really have a lot to do with the outcome of the race, and that's one good part about having a crew like Cotton Owens has because I trust these boys with, well, virtually with my life, and to know that every one of them care about your well-being and the way they treat you around the race track is just a great honor for me to be able to run for a guy like Cotton.

**SCR:** Do you think there needs to be any improvement in the roll cages?

**BAKER:** No, the roll cages, as of right now, are as good as they can be. There's some mighty smart people that build these race cars, and if they thought it needed another bar, it would be in there.

**SCR:** Do you think any special or new type of suit will be needed for the driver, especially for mid-summer races here at Talladega? You have a 500 mile race coming up on August 23, and it's going to be mighty hot down here. How do you feel about that?

**BAKER:** Well, this is something I would like to see some big company develop. Helmets are beautiful; they work real well, but there are several of us using the new whole face coverage type helmet, and I wear a mask now. With the windows open it does create a little more heat in the car, and we quit using the "cool suits" a few years ago. Somebody ought to be able to come up with some way of making a whole unit . . . the helmet, the suit and everything into one unit and a little more padding . . . like your knees, every time you hit a wall darn near head-on, you tear your knees to pieces; you skin yourself up all over. There ought to be some way to build a complete unit. Just like in everyday fashions, eventually the racing uniforms, helmets, seats,

steering wheels and everything will be changed; I feel sure of that. Some day we will look right now like Daniel Boone looks to modern day man because it's got to change, and somebody will do it.

**SCR:** When the 366 cubic inch engines come in next year, there will be a whole new ball game. What do you feel the chances are of going 200 miles per hour in such a car, and how soon will that be, if ever?

**BAKER:** Well, 366 cubic inches is real fast on a go-kart, but I don't really think that 200 signifies a better race than 160. I think one of the best races I ever ran in my life was at Atlanta three years ago. We ran at 149, 150, something like that, but there were 10 cars running that fast. I saw the people, and I could pretty well judge they were having a big time. I came off the corner a lot of times and the whole grandstand was standing up. When I made my pit stop 100 miles later they sat down while we were getting our gas and tires; when we went back out, they got back up again. Those cars really put on a show. I think that's indicative. I don't think the people actually go to see a car run 200 miles an hour anyway; they go to see competition, and, thank goodness, NASCAR's got it.

**SCR:** Now that all of the top cars have qualified for this ALABAMA 500, it looks like this world record that you hold, Buddy Baker, is going to stand for some time. How does it feel to be the world's fastest man on a closed circuit?

**BAKER:** Well, it sounds good just to hear it. As you know, there are so many things in racing . . . if you win a major race, it's a great honor and everything, but you're not the only guy that's ever done that, and the next week, it's just about forgotten. You might say . . . well, I won Charlotte in 1967 (the NATIONAL 500), so what, so-and-so (Donnie Allison) won it last year. Well, there's only one man that can ever be the first to run 200, and that's something that, even when I'm an old man, I can sit on the front porch and pat my foot and tell all my grandchildren about because it's just something that is a great honor for me. I don't feel like I did anything that 20 other drivers could not have done; it's just that I was the guy, and it's something I can remember out of my racing. It means something to me, quite a bit, as a matter of fact.



*Far left*—Buddy Baker at speed at Talladega in March, 1970, setting a new world's record. Chrysler News Photo. *Left*—Buddy during qualifying for the 1970 Atlanta 500 in the Cotton Owens Dodge Charger Daytona. Dozier Mobley photo. *Above*—An ecstatic Buddy Baker poses with the pit board showing his world record speed. Chrysler News Photo.