

Hansgen Dies But Records Live On At VIR

BY: JOHNNY JOHNSON



Walt, (second from left) VIR Trophies And Sponsoring Shriners in 1959

When National Cup races of the Sports Car Club of America are held at the Virginia International Raceway three weeks from this weekend, many an "old-time fan" will be rooting for a phantom.

The one driver who did more than any other to make VIR one of the great tracks and great races of the SCCA, Walt Hansgen, then of Westfield, N.J., is dead. Even in death he holds more important records at VIR than any three other drivers combined.

Hansgen, who had advanced to international prominence, was fatally injured at Le Mans last weekend when his Ford Mark II flipped end-over-end as he practiced for the 24-hour June race. His upper body was crushed and he was trapped in the flaming wreckage before being pulled free. The 46-year-old driver lived for several days but never regained consciousness.

Hansgen's records at VIR will be assaulted April 30-May 1—but despite modern equipment and techniques, many of his records will continue to stand. The "old-timers" would have it no other way.

Their thoughts will go back to the winter of 1956-57, when a new arrival on the Danville scene, Ed Kemm of Greensboro, started building something called a "sports car road racing course" on the Foote farm 11 miles east of Danville, near Milton, N.C. They knew of "stock car racing"—then primitive by today's standards—but this was something new (and was then considered somewhat silly by most of the natives).

Promoter Kemm finally announced a 27-foot wide asphalt track had been built for 3.2 miles, up and down hill and with the "Dangerous Dozen" curves, in a bend of Dan River and the inaugural races would be held Aug. 3-4, 1957.