

STREET SCENE

Fabulous fakes

You may lack the buying power to dress in mink and dazzle your friends in diamonds, but for a few dollars less you can dress like you've found success with fabulous fakes. Yes, cubic zirconia may be a girl's best friend in the 1980s. And fake furs may be one way to avoid confrontations with animal rights activists. Find out more about those and other fabulous fakes on Page 6D.

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

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Don't let the T-shirts scare you. This pit crew is anything but "Bad Boys" when it comes to keeping its car in competition.

photos by STEVE CANTRELL/staff photographer

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

How do you know you are not in the multinational world of Grand Prix racing? The language spoken might be the first clue.

At the Grand Prix, one can hear French, Spanish and Italian spoken fluently. At Flat Rock Speedway, the tongue of the stock car racing buff can be a little right of English at times.

Or, for example, as one patron of the sport articulated upon his encounter with an attendant who was checking proper credentials for admission to the pit area, "I'm going to knock that son of a bitch on his ass one of these days."

Such eloquent statements can only sum up what is the nitty-gritty world of country stock car racing where dust swirls after every lap and race cars backfire with the frequency to make you think you're in the Battle of 1812.

A Saturday night at Flat Rock Speedway is like none other. People drive from all over the tri-county area in everything from pickup trucks to recreational vehicles to savor the thrills and spills of stock car racing at the rural track.

Some other indications that you're at Flat Rock, not Monaco:
• While Indy cars are billboards for STP, Valvoline and Ford Motor Co., drivers at Flat Rock Speedway are sponsored by Bill's Pizza & Subs and the Hanger Lounge.

• While drivers feast on stuffed shrimp washed down with champagne at pre-Grand Prix parties, the guy at Flat Rock stirs a vat of homemade chili next to his car.

• WHILE CELEBS like Paul Newman and Mick Jagger can be found at Grand Prix events, people like former Tiger pitcher Milt Wilcox make appearances at Flat Rock Speedway.

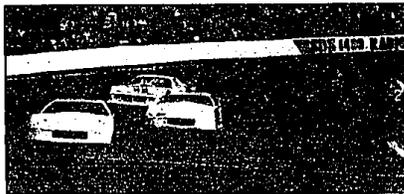
Needless to say, things are little more "down home" at the Michigan race track. For many, a Saturday night at Flat Rock Speedway has become a way of life.

"My dad was a racer before he passed away," said Steve Cronenwett of Westland, who races

FLAT ROCK: life in the fast lane

'I like the competition. Something about having all that power underneath you.'

— Steve Cronenwett



The action isn't quite as fast-paced as at Indy, but it's just as exciting as the cars handle the curve of Flat Rock's quarter-mile track.



The fans come in all shapes and sizes on a Saturday night at the Flat Rock Speedway.

in the street stock division at Flat Rock Speedway. "My five brothers all raced at one time or another. It's a family thing.

"I like the competition. Something about having all that power underneath you."

The machines they drive are definitely their own, usually resurrected from a junk yard and converted into a race car.

First, they gut the car's interior. Then a steel cage and sheet metal are placed inside. Braces are installed to support the frame and the engine.

Cronenwett proudly pats the hood of his red street stock car, which he said cost roughly \$5,000 to build.

"This one here, a friend of mine had an old car and I bought it for \$50," Cronenwett said, "and I started from there."

Cronenwett hops in through the driver's side and then a person hands him the steering wheel. He screws it in. A hulking figure wipes the windshield and then spills gasoline into the car.

Todd Irvine is one of Cronenwett's pit crew, which consists mainly of friends and family. Around the pit area, it's not uncommon to see wives, brothers and sisters wiping windshields, changing tires and fetching tools.

"YOUR CREW is volunteer," Cronenwett said. "You can't afford anybody. You have to keep them fed and give them what they want to drink. That's all you can do."

When Cronenwett pulls the safety goggles over his eyes. "Knock 'em dead," said Irvine, hitting his fist on the top of the car. A few feet away, another guy slips on a Pepsi and chats with some other drivers. Joy Fair, 58, has been knocking them dead on speedways since 1949. At Flat Rock Speedway, he holds the record for most wins in the Late Model Stock Car Division — a grade up from street stocks.

His list of 10 season championships run from 1965 until 1981. He hasn't won a season championship since 1981, but Fair doesn't sound like a man who's ready to throw in the wrench.

Saturday nights at Flat Rock Speedway have become such a routine, he wouldn't know what else to do.

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Warp Factor

Karlos Barney



"So you see, gentlemen, by counting the number of rings on his head, we can determine the exact time of death."

Montague Inn: A gem of a B&B

By Mary Augusta Rodgers
special writer

Q: I see that the Montague Inn in Saginaw is now listed in the guidebook, "Country Inns and Back Roads" and am wondering what it's like to visit. Also, should we take our toddler there, or leave him home with a baby-sitter?

A: The Montague Inn is a gem in an unusual setting, considering Saginaw's reputation as an industrial, have-a-beer-and-go-to-the-hockey-game town.

It's the kind of country inn that used to be found mainly in Europe, offering a quiet, pleasant setting, attractive decor, good food, good service and attention to details. Nothing has brightened the U.S. travel picture as much as the recent appearance of places like the Montague Inn.

Business men and women are most in evidence during the week, with travelers and country inn enthusiasts taking over on the weekends. It's not surprising that people

think of the inn for special occasions — five honeymoon couples once arrived on the same weekend. The Montague Inn is a stately

Georgian manor house, built of rose-colored brick with cream colored trim and green shutters, set on eight acres and surrounded by fine

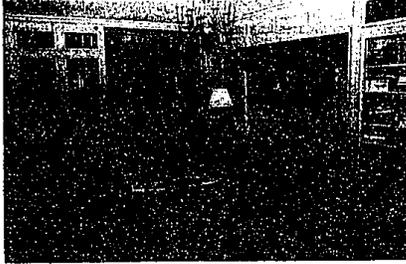
old trees, shrubs and flowers. At the back, a well-tended lawn slopes down to a small lake. Gulls circle overhead and the Lake Linton water sparkles in the sun.

The house was built in 1929 by Robert Montague, a farmer who made a fortune from a hand-cleaning formula he sold to the Jergens Co. Mr. and Mrs. Montague and their two children lived there in fine style, with a staff of five servants, and entertained a great deal.

By the early 1960s, the Montague era was over. The house was used for city offices, then stood empty for years. It might have been demolished, if a few people hadn't seen the possibilities in the dilapidated but strong old place, built with oak beams and hand-made bricks and with six fireplaces.

SO THE HOUSE was bought and restored under the direction of Norman Kinney, one of five owners. Kinney had previously restored the National House Inn in Marshall.

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MICKY JONES

Guests find the inn's library, with its bay windows, window seats, books and magazines within easy reach and tables for games irresistible.