

# TRAVEL



## Des Moines throws party with Grand Prix

By John Payne  
Senior Editor

I read somewhere once about a man who, down on his luck, pulled his broken-down car into a Texaco station. He asked the attendant if he could spare a few dollars worth of gas to get him to his destination. Against his better judgement, the attendant did, with only the man's promise that he would someday repay him. To make a long story short, the man who had once begged for gasoline went on to build an air freight company (Burlington Air Express, I think). Not only does his company buy fuel exclusively from Texaco, but he also insists that his employees use only Texaco gasoline.

What's the moral here? I'm not sure, but one thing's certain: If some quirk of fate should make a rich man out of me, I'll have a great deal to pay back to the city of Des Moines, Iowa, specifically to the media coordinators for the Ruan Greater Des Moines Grand Prix.

This was the second year for the weekend event, and the good people who organized it let my photographer and I pose as journalists through these three days of thunder. Actually, one couldn't swing a dead cat there without hitting a member of the press, so we were able to remain pretty inconspicuous.

Grand Prix style racing is eminently more exciting than the oval track racing of stock or sprint cars. City streets provide the race course, and the entire city is the arena. People watch from high-rise balconies, parking complexes and rooftops. They sit and watch as professionals haul ass

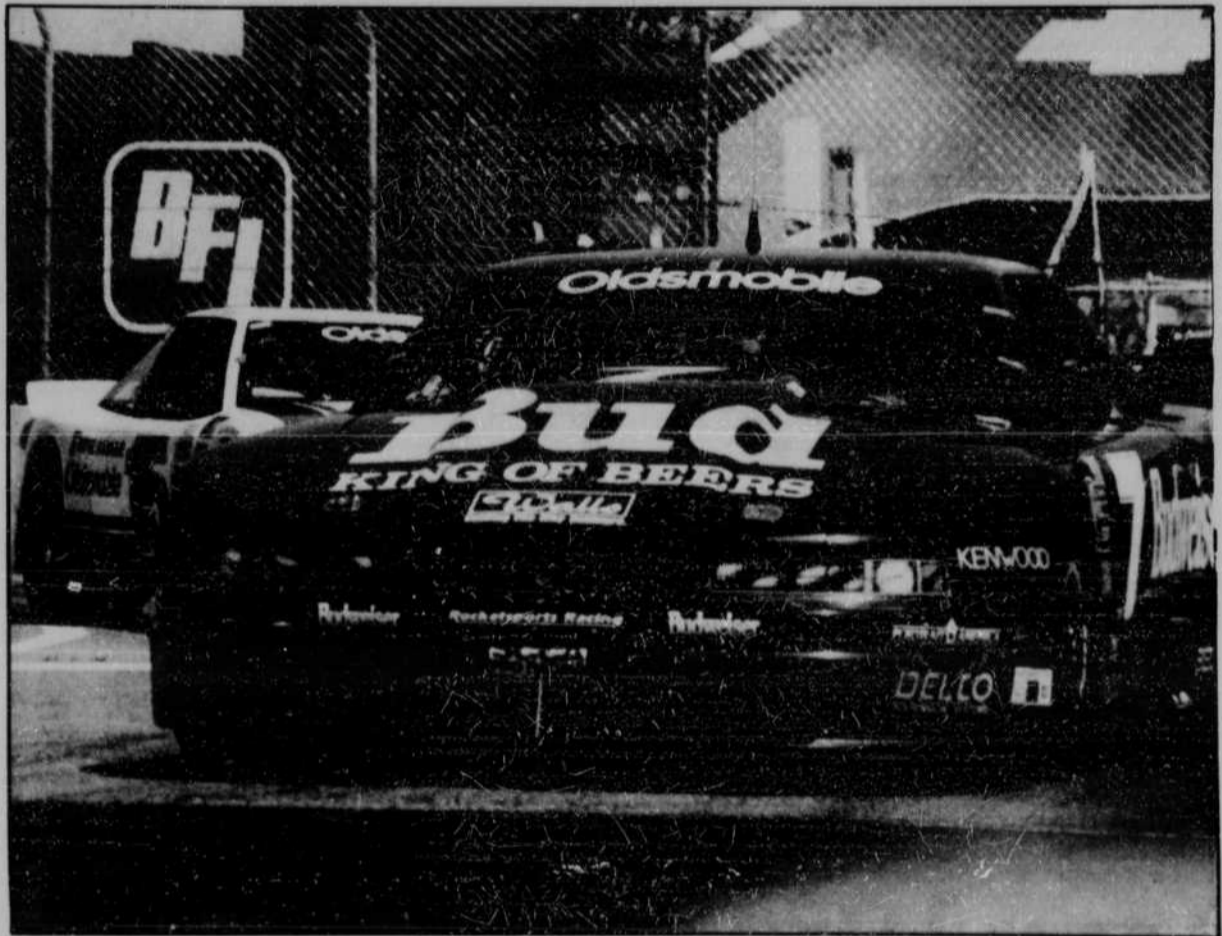
through town the way spectators always have wanted to. And all the while they wait for some poor soul to get a little too brave on one of the course's more treacherous turns. It's an amazing spectacle.

Friday, as time trials were just getting started, Cadillac-sized craters had opened up in the middle of two downtown streets. One of the sinkholes appeared less than a block away from turn number 6, so many of the locals knocked off work early to see if any part of the track would give way during the race.

This year, the Grand Prix Committee had wised up a bit. They found out that even in the sweltering heat Des Moines endured last year, people would still pay to see an event of this magnitude. They really had clamped down on the distribution of free passes, which were so abundant last year.

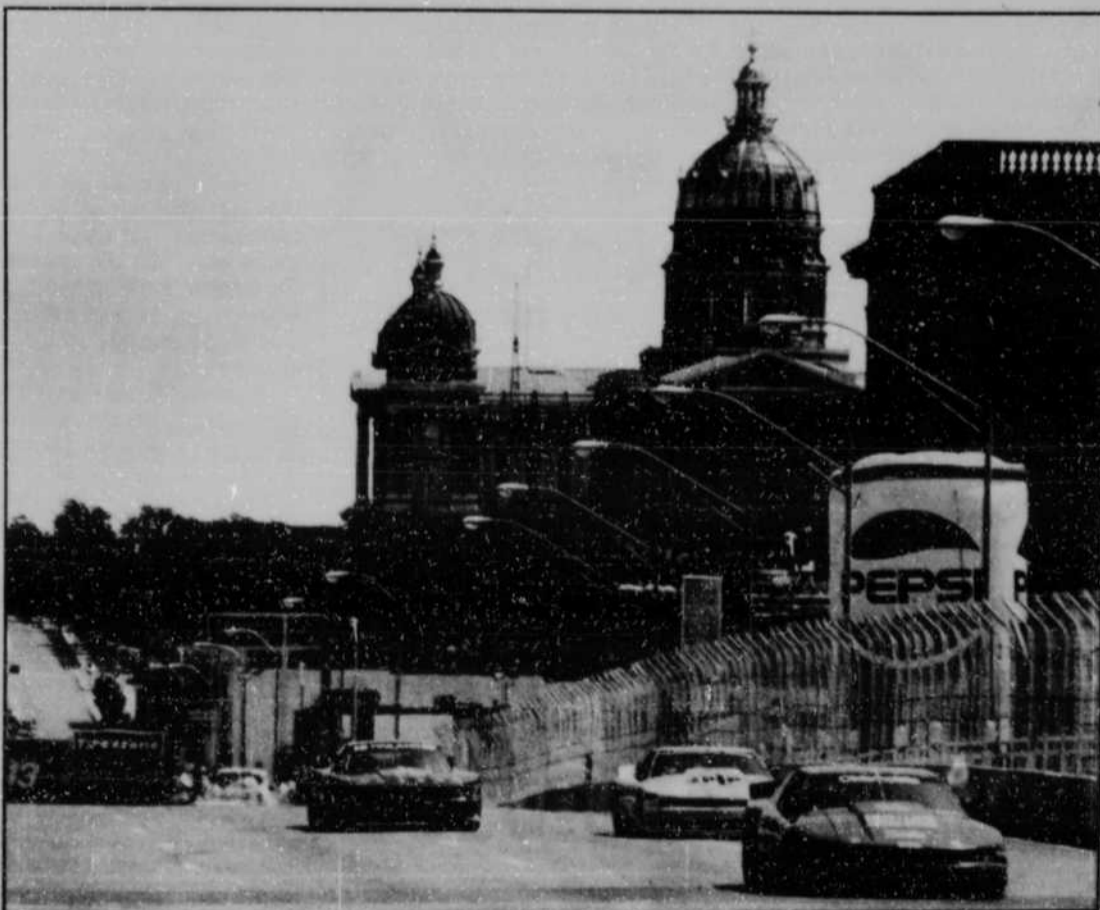
Most of the windows on the city's three-mile skyway system had been painted over to keep spectators from overloading them to cop a better look at the action on the track. The press credentials my photographer and I received were like gold. There was absolutely nowhere that we couldn't go with these laminated babies, including the pit area and several crucial turns.

More importantly though, the passes gave us access to the hospitality suites reserved for local banks, insurance companies and retail stores. The procedure was always the same: We would walk up the stairs to suites overlooking the finish line, grab a bite of whatever delicacy was on hand, help ourselves to the champagne and scotch, then mingle with those who HAD paid good money to be there.



The hospitality suites were an especially good spot to watch the race, because when the cars were out of view, one could see exactly what was going on by looking at one of the many television monitors.

See **GRAND PRIX** on 14



Photos by Craig Sovey for the Daily Nebraskan



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