



THE EYES HAVE IT

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It's been 60 years since this little island experienced its first real taste of full throttle competitive American style drag racing, with the inaugural British Drag Fest held in 1964. The first event, held at Blackbushe on the 19th September, was described by Dennis Jenkins in *MotorSport*: "Side by side they raced up the 1/4-mile, wheels spinning all the way, and past the timing beams at the end, and then they both let out their braking parachutes and came to rest. That was American Drag racing and, in case anyone thought it was just showmanship, the times were 8.28 sec. for Don Garlits, with a terminal speed of 191 m.p.h. and 8.58 sec. for Tommy Ivo, with a terminal speed of 184 m.p.h."

In fact, 1964 was not the first time Britain had seen American dragsters on this drizzly soil. In 1963, Las Vegas speed shop owner Dante Van Dusen (Dante Duce) and Dean Moon sent the 600bhp Potvin blower equipped 300ci Chevy-powered MOONEYES dragster over to England to challenge British Dragster builder, Sydney Allard, to a closed competition. The RAC diluted the idea of match races to demonstration runs as Mooneyes did not have front brakes however. On September 10th, demonstration runs were presented by Duce and Allard, and press were present to record the 9.48 elapsed time at 166 mph of the Mooneyes dragster.

Allard and Duce then demonstrated tyre-smoking sprints at the Brighton Speed Trials, where they were joined, unbeknownst to them when planning the UK trip, by Mickey Thompson. 30,000 shocked Britons looked on in horror as the nitro-burning American teams set fire to the hay bales lining Madeira Drive, and they were hooked. The word got out, and crowds flocked the following day to their final challenge of the 1963 trip, held at RAF Debden and flagged by Dean Moon himself. Duce and Moon left feeling enthused by what they had experienced in the UK, and they returned to the States to put together an American team for the following year.

