

REACTION *time*

Seeing the Light.

BY LARRY ERICKSMOEN

I'm sure anyone bracket racing today realizes it's gotten extremely competitive. The present form of dial-in breakout racing has been around for more than 20 years, and there are a number of racers, me included, who've been hitting the racetracks every year.

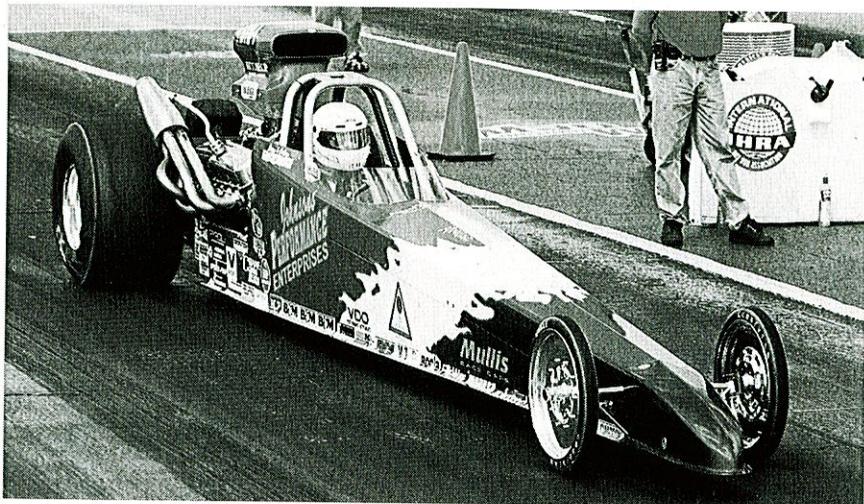
At virtually any bracket race in the country, the first round includes many veteran racers who have the experience and ability to execute precision driving in order to get their car to the final round. Of course, there are many, like me, who'd rather be lucky than good.

The typical Super Pro dragster has been refined to the point where it's capable of running the same ET every round on any given night. Of course, the new delay boxes and Auto Start systems have given the driver a number of chances of hitting the Tree perfectly—although after hitting the top bulb twice and the bump-down three times, you're still in trouble if you don't remember to put the gas pedal down. Yes, I've done that!

Even when the racer is at home, he has the ability to hone his starting line skills by utilizing a practice Tree anytime during the week. It's especially fun if you can beat your wife over and over again (at the practice Tree, that is). And it's pretty common knowledge that what you eat and drink affects your reaction times, another thing to remember if your wife is your practice Tree partner and also the family cook!

So what else can you do to improve driving performance? For me, it was improving my vision. Not that I had poor vision. I've worn glasses since fifth grade, and they gave me excellent vision. But the glasses themselves were a problem. There were many times after I closed my helmet visor and pre-staged that my glasses completely fogged up. Leaving the starting line with fogged-up glasses in a car that runs 168 mph is pretty scary for a guy named Larry, or anyone else, for that matter. I also thought my peripheral vision was compromised, which didn't help my finish line driving, and generally, glasses were a pain when taking my helmet on and off.

Thankfully, we live in a time when eye-



sight can be restored with laser surgery. I was nearsighted and had astigmatism, and research told me both problems could be corrected with a procedure called Lasik. Fortunately, living in St. Petersburg, Florida, I have one of the country's most experienced Lasik surgeons right here in town. Dr. Stephen Updegraff owns several patents on the devices used in the procedure, and he was one of the first doctors in the country to do Lasik.

In Lasik, short for laser in situ Keratomileusis, a microsurgical instrument is used to open a flap on the cornea. Computer-controlled pulses of laser light reshape the cornea, and the flap is then closed. The procedure for both eyes takes less than 30 minutes and costs about \$4,500.

At first I thought this procedure was pretty exotic, but I was told thousands have had it done at the Updegraff Laser Vision Center. Nationally, I've read where pro athletes like quarterback Troy Aikman, baseball star Wade Boggs, golfer Tom Kite and race car driver Bryan Huerta have had the procedure done recently. I guess I'm in good company.

If you wear contact lenses, you won't have to worry about a contact popping out or moving up and down on the corneal surface. You just have the prescription zapped right onto the eyes.

Although I can't say I've won a bunch of big races in the weeks since the surgery, I can say my overall vision is better and I feel much more comfortable without those pesky glasses. I did notice I have no more problems with glare from the lights at night while staging. And during those hot and

humid summers, I won't have sweat-covered lenses to look through while working on my car. Plus my friends say I look at least four to five months younger!

Because I'm hopelessly hooked, I plan to continue bracket racing for many more years, and I'll continue to do what it takes to be competitive. I'm just trying to keep pace with the Richardsons, the Folks, and the Erks of the world. I think having the Lasik surgery was another step in that direction.

But I suppose if everyone with these incredibly consistent, electronic-equipped, ultra-fast dragsters gets their vision improved, bracket racing will only become more competitive than it is now. Yuck! What can we do about it? Sounds like a topic for another *Reaction Time*.



Larry Ericksmoen is a pro ET racer who lives with his wife Coleen in St. Petersburg, Florida. He's a three-time NHRA Division 2 champion in Super Pro and Super Gas, and currently races a Mullis Super Comp dragster and C/Altered Olds Cutlass in Comp Eliminator. DRUS!