

DRAG RACING DOESN'T TAKE BLIND LUCK TO TRIUMPH

By [Allison Keyes](#)

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Dave Edstrom has an ongoing love affair with auto racing. "You hear the sound of the motors and feel the ground shake at races and it really adds to the excitement," he said.

Edstrom, 41, of St. Paul, has a special perspective on auto racing because he has been blind since 1975 because of complications from diabetes. Last year, he built his current racer, "Blind Faith." The sleek, aluminum, black funny car has 3,000 horsepower; it can reach 260 m.p.h. in less than six seconds on a quarter-mile stretch.

Edstrom's son Mike, 20, drives the car. Mike started driving tow vehicles at races when he was just 14, and graduated to dragsters three years ago.

"Blind Faith" is a Pontiac Trans Am that sports a 498-cubic-inch hemi

(engine) and runs on 90 percent nitromethane gas. In a quarter-mile race, the auto eats up nine gallons of gas at \$30 a gallon.

Edstrom said being blind is hard, but it doesn't stop him from enjoying life. "You can't just sit in a corner and cry about a situation," the former machinist said.

He has been building dragsters for 17 years, and switched to funny

(custom-built) cars last year. "I can draw pictures in my mind of what things look like. I just use my hands to feel what I used to be able to see," he said.

Edstrom will show the car in the 1987 [Chicago Auto Show](#) at McCormick Place, where it will be joined by four others exhibited by members of the [National Hot Rod Association](#).

Tom Baum, an association member from Des Plaines, is organizing the exhibit for the seventh year. His award-winning alcohol dragster, "The Xicutioner," also will be in the exhibit. Other cars in the exhibit will be the 1987 Buick Somerset, owned by Joe Covert of Wisconsin; the show-winning Camaro, owned

by Mike Alberts of Burbank; and the "His and Hers" Olds, owned by Judy Bureski of Des Plaines.

Baum said most of the drivers exhibit their cars in auto shows to get exposure, and thus perhaps a little help from interested people with a major problem--money. The cars cost between \$5,000 and \$50,000, not to mention the gas and transportation to races. Baum, who races full time, said he has about 11 sponsors contributing \$1,500 to \$2,000 each to help with expenses.

Edstrom also races full time, and added that he is still seeking a sponsor.

More than 800,000 people attended association races last year, the group's figures show. Baum said his group exhibits in the auto show to

"expose the sport of racing and Chicago race cars to the public." Some members of the group race full time, but many drivers have other jobs and race as a hobby, Baum said.

The Chicago region of the Sports Car Club of America also will be exhibiting at this year's auto show. Claire Ball, chairman of the region's auto show committee, is organizing the exhibit. Ball said his group will show about 12 cars, including one from last year's [Indy 500](#).

The club does road racing, group competition on race tracks that duplicate the myriad straights and curves of normal driving. The group also uses oval courses.

Among the cars being shown are formula, pro-rally, solo and vintage vehicles. Formula cars are similar to those used in the Indy 500, with open wheels that protrude from the sides of the car, Ball said. Vintage cars are older models ranging from 10 to 25 years old. Pro-rally cars are used in rally races, which take place on highway courses. Solo races are held in parking lots, and drivers compete against a clock on a course set up with pylons.

Many cars look like street vehicles except for the safety measures required by most tracks, Ball said. For example, the pro-rally car looks factory-made except for the roll cage or bar, a hoop behind the head of the driver.

Race cars usually have roll cages--one behind the driver and another by the windshield. "When people watch road racing, they exclaim over the parts flying when a car crashes," Ball said. "All the outside parts are just there for aerodynamics and stuff--they're supposed to fly away. You just want that bar there for protection."

Ball's organization has about 35,000 members nationwide from 100 regions. The group has 1,500 members in the Chicago region, and sponsors a wide range of racing events year round. It exhibits in auto shows in hopes of getting more people involved in the sport, said Ball, who is from Wheeling.

