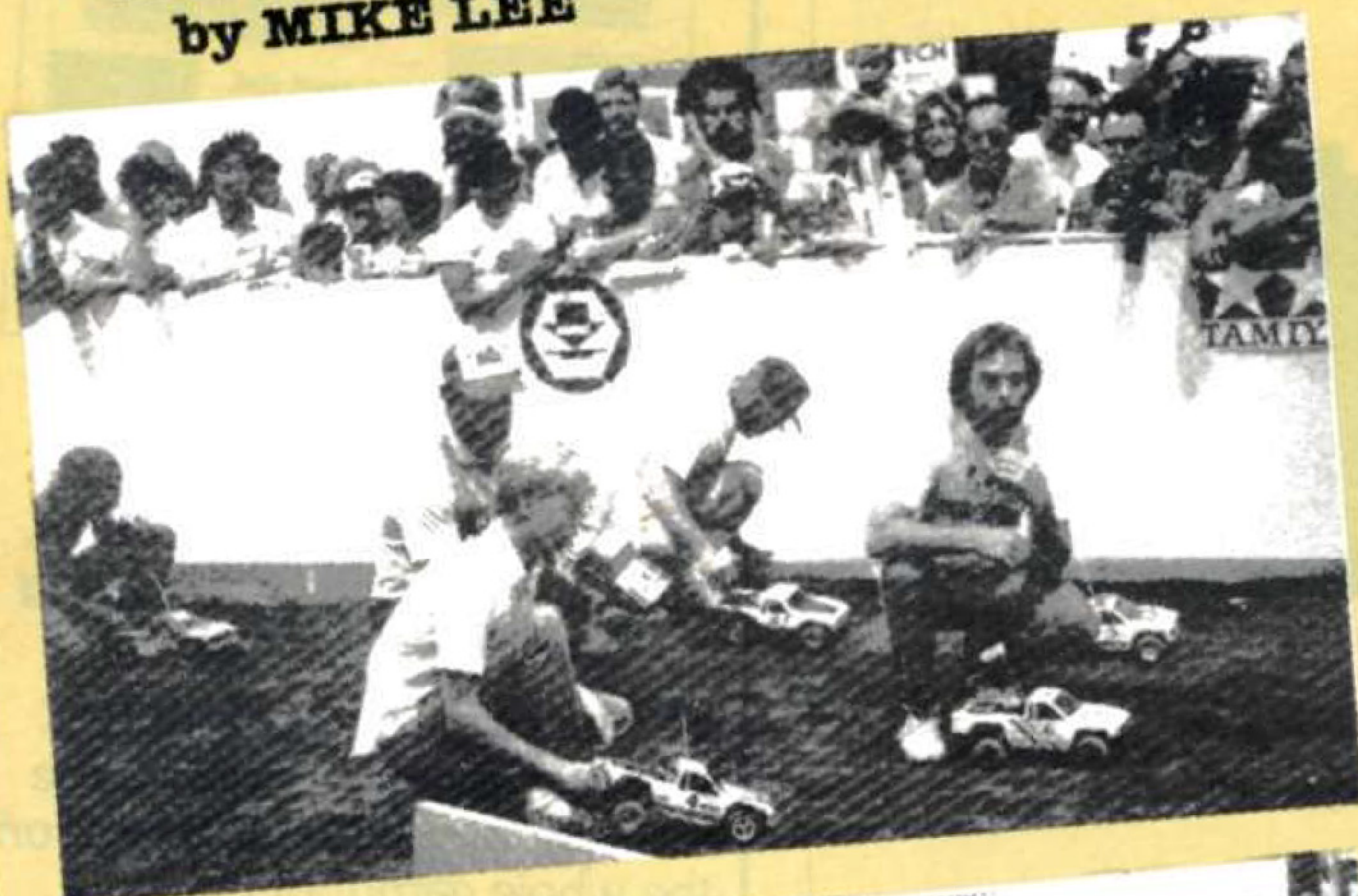


MRC/Tamiya

Off-Road Champions

by MIKE LEE



Clockwise from top left: Mechanics look to drivers for final nod before leaving cars—good team work. Good view and spacing on the drivers' stand. At only 18, "Jammin'" Jay Halsey is one of the world's best. Track crew giving TLC to track before next round.

THE SCENE FOR THE 5th SCORE-MRC/TAMIYA Off-Road Championships was Anaheim, California, and what a scene it was! This prestigious event has been one of the birthplaces for the off-road racing sport. Indeed, this race has seen the evolution of dirt-throwing from the very start.

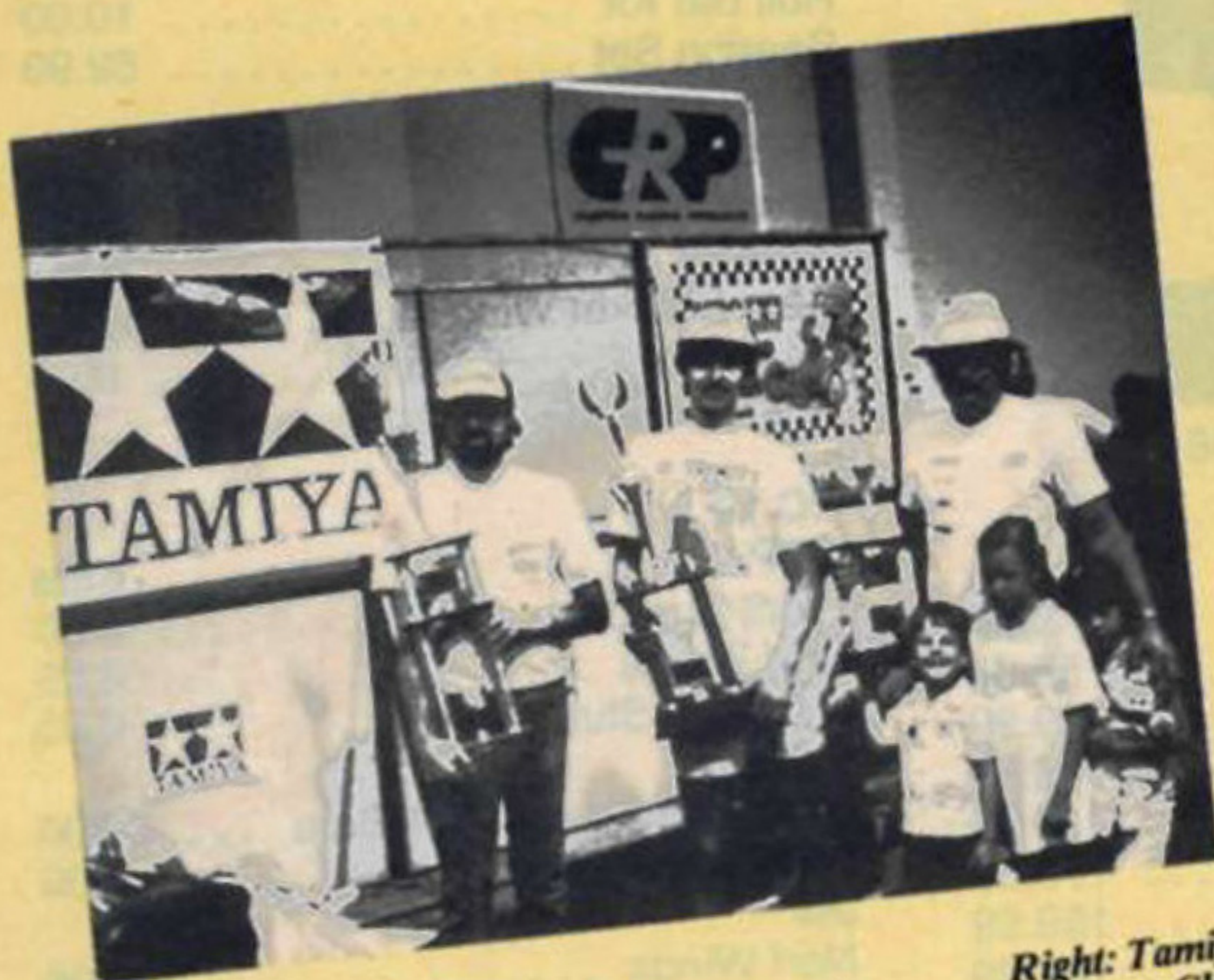
The people at MRC/Tamiya conceived the idea for this race to help make the sport grow by exposing model car racing to full-scale off-road enthusiasts at the popular SCORE Off-Road Show and Convention. SCORE is the governing body for full-size off-road racing on the West Coast, responsible for famous

races such as the Baja, the Barstow to Vegas, and the Mexicali.

At the first race, the cars featured were the famous Sand Scorcher, Rough Riders, and F-150 Ford trucks that MRC marketed and blew open the whole sport with. The heats were run based on the first driver to finish the



ships



Right: Tamiya Open Class winners; from left: MRC's Mr. Giacomino; Rick Walton, third; Mike Dunn, second; and Chris Alec, first.



Far left: Tamiya Stock Class winners; from left: Hobie Kaptan, first; Chris Alec, second; and Paul Williams, third. Left: Good clean starting point gave all drivers an equal chance for a good start.



prescribed number of laps. Races that followed were run with 3-minute heats, gut-wrenching (at least for the drivers) 4-minute races, and finally the Open Class races. Each year has given the drivers a bigger and better challenge.

This year's running was no disappointment. Four classes of racing were scheduled; two classes for Tamiya based cars, featuring Tamiya Stock and Tamiya Open, and two other classes—the Two-Wheel Open Class and the Heavy Metal Class. Heats were a standard 4 minutes.

The track itself was a fun track layout. Assembled inside the Anaheim Convention Center just across from Disneyland, the track was a well-cultured dirt-and-turf course. It was bordered with a 4-foot high wooden barrier just outside of a 6-inch wood course barrier. Let's take a tour of the track:

Starting from the back straight, the cars made their starts and headed down about 25 feet of clear track. The first turn was only a slight right curve, but headed right into the main stadium jump. The right line took drivers straight off and over, a slight miss sent them tumbling. Just over the jump was a hard left

turn, followed by turn three, a half-rounded 180° sweeper. Blasting out of this, there were only 8 to 10 feet before a hard right followed by the left of turn five; this had cars sliding. Drivers had to blip the power and hit the right wheel again for the turn six dogleg and onto the main straight. Finally, there was some room to open up. The straight was about 75 feet of wide-open throttle. Close to the end was a slight right, followed by the hairpin of turn eight.

Drivers launched hard from the hairpin and headed for the high banked turn of number nine. An irritator was only a nuisance on the way there. Cars had to stay wide on the bank and sling-shot down toward the deadly triple jumps. The first jump was the worst, for if a driver dumped it on this one, it would torture him for the other two. Power was

needed to hop at least the first two and then take the third.

After contending with the jumps, one had to hit the brakes hard, blast out of turn ten, a sweeping dogleg, then head for the stadium jump again.

It was a delightful course to drive, with great traction and room to pass. The driving skill required was average to good.

The racing started with qualifying on Friday, June 20. Entry not only got you in the door, but into the best showing of off-road equipment and vehicles anywhere.

First to qualify was the Tamiya Stock Class. This class was limited to any type of Tamiya car currently sold. They came out in force, with everything from early Sand Scorchers to state-of-the-art Super

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Shots. Motors were restricted to RS-540s and 6-cell batteries. Top qualifier in this class was veteran Tamiya driver, Hobie Captan. Hobie has driven this race every year and knows more about Tamiyas than anyone. Chris Alec was second fast man.

In Tamiya Open Class, Mike Dunn put in top time with his highly-modified Tamiya. Mike has been a top driver for some time in off-road. Again, Chris Alec was second fast man. In this class, the cars started out life as box stock Tamiya cars and ended up as super-fast Tamiya killers!

In the Two-Wheel Drive Class, World Champion driver "Jammin'" Jay Halsey was the top qualifier. Jay has always been a tough contender, and is even today at age 18. Mike Dunn made tough guy Jay sweat by being second fastest in qualifying.

The Heavy Metal category is the newest class. Consisting of any type of car you want—open motors, 7-cells, and a truck body—this class was great! Four-wheelers or two-wheelers sported the big truck bodies that rattled and flopped, and added the special touch of fun. The spectators ate it up.

Top driver in Heavy Metal was the tough guy again, Jay Halsey. His car was virtually the same as his two-wheel class car, only sporting a truck body. Handling was probably much different. Chris Alec threatened yet again, with second fastest time.

One of the nicest things about this track was the care that went into it, both when it was set up and when the race was in progress. Every round had workers scouring the course to put everything in tip-top shape for the next round. Real grass was laid into the infield areas to not only keep down dust, but to present a bit of an obstacle to the cars. It didn't really stop anyone, but it definitely slowed them down. Wood board barriers also kept the honest drivers very honest. These were placed at strategic corners where a driver could easily leap by another driver.

Now for the racing. There was a tremendous turnout for this race, and the mains went from A to H. In Tamiya Stock, the C Main event saw Mike Guiterrez battle it out with another contender, until Mike left his opponent behind in a crash just 15 seconds from the finish. Mike took that opportunity to win and bump up to the B Main event.

The B Main saw Devon Dennis take a Tamiya Fox to a clean victory, virtually dominating the field. He took the bump-up and faced off the eight fastest Tamiya Stock drivers in Southern California.

At the start of the A Main, five cars stayed together through the first minute, jumping and sliding together. Hobie Captan, the TQ man, finally broke through the crowd and ran away! Paul

Williams and Chris Alec chased hard, but were unable to catch Captan. In the last minute, Alec and Williams had to abandon the chase and fight for second place. While Hobie Captan fed the field his dust, Alec captured second and Williams a close third. For the effort, Captan not only got himself a win, but he got a vacation trip to Hawaii, courtesy of MRC/Tamiya!

In the Tamiya Open Class, I got in with the B Main event. Big Rick Walton, the only guy with the guts and power to drive a truck in this class, proved his mettle and blew away the B Main for a convincing win. He took the bump-up and only a moment later found himself lined up with some tough Tamiya competition. Don Arndt was second in the B Main.

The A Main race promised to be good viewing. About 300 to 400 spectators lined the track to watch the action. They were treated to a spectacular start. Nine cars roared from the line and hit the stadium jump within 2 seconds. Imagine, if you can, nine cars leaping over the main jump, all in less than a second, some hitting in mid-air while others were tromped by cars flying down onto them. Amazingly, Chris Alec survived the airborne attack and jumped out in front. Rick Walton blasted his truck out of the mess and grabbed second place, with Mike Dunn hot on the trail.

By the halfway point, Dunn passed the truck and started bearing down on Alec. Carl Thompson also started bearing down on Walton's truck and a minute later he took third place from Walton. Alec was being cautious and protecting his lead, and Dunn sensed it. He put the car to the floor, but Alec was not to be denied. With just seconds left, Alec sprinted and just got by the timing clock as the time expired. That stopped Dunn and a hard-charging Walton who clipped by Thompson for third. Alec took his victory lap with ease and collected a trip to the winner's circle.

In the Open Two-Wheel Class, Tony Rossetti dominated the C Main event and used it for practice for the B Main event. It wasn't good enough, however, as Chris Alec showed the way through the B Main. Rossetti chased Alec for the first half, but fell victim to traffic. Alec was to try his luck again in the A Main.

These were no easy nine drivers to face. In there were two World Champions, two National Champions, and the rest were at least Regional Champions. Jammin' Jay Halsey looked to be the top seeded driver. He performed!

From the very start, Jay showed the rest why he has won the world title. The

car had incredible power and was one of only half-a-dozen cars with enough guts to leap all three jumps of the triples! He actually had to back off the stadium jump to prevent flying past the next turn. Chris Lett tried to chase Jay, but found he had problems of his own when Mike Dunn and Mike Christensen pulled up to challenge. The fight was on for second and third while Jammin' Jay took every line perfectly cautiously. By the 3-minute mark, Jay lapped Dunn and was aiming to lap Lett. Lett stood on it and managed to keep from being lapped while sealing up second place. At the end, Jammin' Jay Halsey was still jammin' in the winner's circle. Dunn was third behind Lett. The rest of the field was left somewhere in the dust.

Now the Heavy Metal Class. In the C Main, Eustace Moore had fun throughout and whistled his way to first and a bump-up. Eustace looked good for the B Main, and so did everyone else.

In the B Main a great race developed between D. Armenteros and Ron Rossetti. These two drivers slugged it out for 3 minutes, trading places all the way for first. Armenteros finally got a break when Rossetti rolled it, only to get the big one! Armenteros hit the stadium jump, but landed hard and lost the right front wheel! That was all she wrote for the car and Rossetti shot by for the win. Eustace Moore trundled by for second.

In the Main event, nine trucks lined up for what promised to be another slug fest. Again, Jammin' Jay Halsey was the top seed. This time, he disappointed! On the very first lap, the truck stalled and left Jay nervously grinding his teeth while pit crew members ripped into the car. Meanwhile, Steve Dunn was out blasting the track with his brother Mike Dunn and Chris Lett breathing down his neck.

Halfway down Gil Losi Jr. let his presence be known as he blasted by everyone to jump into second. Mike Dunn picked up the hint and went WFO. The racers went at it hard, but time was now against them. At 3½ minutes, Steve Dunn was still leading, with Losi in second and brother Mike in third. Ron Rossetti made one last stab at the lead and managed to make it up to fourth. Too late, however, and Steve Dunn took the checkered flag. Losi was second and Mike Dunn finished third.

What a race to watch. The competition was well matched and exciting. And talk about a perfect place with millions of dollars of dirt-stomping, off-road gear surrounding the track. MRC/Tamiya certainly knows how to do racing, and our hat's off to them. It is off-road racing at the very best it can get, and one that you should be in. I'm eagerly looking forward to next year's event. With a class outfit like this, there's no way to lose! ■