

THE STARTING GRID

By Richard Schalhamer

Boredom, uselessness.

Glove-wrapped-index-finger taps gauges,

needles are trapped at zero,

-shackled by a 5-point racing harness,

Quick-release buckle claws chest,

personal parts are harshly haltered by crotch-strap: flat on back,

inches off ground,

head only protrudes above frame,

world is feet and legs of giants.

Fireproof underwear and gloves battling with the summer sun,

Fireproof hood married to helmet,

tunnel vision in front,

rear view mirrors,

a surreal snapshot of world behind.

Face-plate up lets breath out,

dodging flashes of claustrophobia and fear.

Pit crew swarms like bridesmaids around a nervous bride,

last minute inspections and equipment check... Danger?

Palms sweat from anxiety, not summer heat!

Stomach fluttering like miller moth in a lampshade,

Excitement and fear are battling in head;

Waiting amplifies all.

Helmet muffles sounds of world.

Only the quiet haze of low rumbles filters through.

crowd and announcers are silent.

crew members yell in face to be heard.

Depress ignition switch: starter motor whines.

Engine inches from ears.

Quick flutter of accelerator.

Carburetors open, fuel flows.

Cylinders explode with vapors and sparks.

World rocks with the torque from turning flywheel...

explosions squeeze through manifold.

Side pipes spit out expanding exhaust.

Ears receive deafening rumble; no hesitation.

Engine in PERFECT tune.

Full power heading to waiting transmission.

Tachometer dances with every caress of accelerator; message that all is well.

Deep voices from other engines join the conversation,
thunderous engine roars are crisp.

Gas fumes and exhaust cover the starting grid.

Burnt oil and rubber join the symphony of aromas; playing a series
of sour notes to nose.

Out of the odorous chaos, like the smell of cooking candy-
sweet smell of burning Castrol...

the bite is taken out of the fetid vapors.

Engines race. Cars rock. Tachometers bounce.

Air clears only when engines settle to a calming idle.

Helmet taps.

Thumbs point to the sky.

pit crews leave...

Drivers alone with breaths held hummingbird hearts.

Light-weight cars with unrealistic horsepower,

waiting for the raised green flag to drop.

Green flag snaps.

Accelerators jam to the floorboards.

Carburetors flap open.

Air sucks- gas spits into cylinders.

Sparks ignite.

Clutches pop.

Tires spin.

Ground accelerates backwards?

Exhaust, Oil, Rubber mist the air...

the world is dissolved in a dense cloud.

Full throttle.

Cars blindly drive into the chemical fog-
out of the cloud the world returns.

Engine noise, is muted by concentration.

Driving has dried up the sweating palms.

Thoughts of winning have squashed the miller moth.

Heartbeat has slowed:

only focus,

finish line,

checkered flag!