

# Top Guns

Bob Schader and Team San Diego Top the 1996 American City Racing League season

BY ROGER DIEZ

**B**ob Schader served notice early that he and his team, San Diego, would be the combination to beat in the American City Racing League in 1996, and no one found a way to stop them.

Schader, who clinched the drivers' title at Sears Point, Calif., in Round 7 of the eight-race series, became the first recipient of the Vasser Cup, named for former ACRL driver and new PPG Indy Car Champion Jimmy Vasser. Team San Diego took home the Blackaller Cup Team Championship trophy, edging Team Las Vegas in the series' ninth season for 2-liter Ford-powered sports-racing cars.

At the Laguna Seca, Calif., season opener in March, Schader was bumped off the pole by mere thousandths of a second by Team Las Vegas' Peter Zarcades. But Zarcades crashed early in the race, and Schader stalked Team San Jose's Lee Lucas until Lucas lost a gear and overheated his tires. Schader pounced and grabbed the first of an eventual five wins on the season. San Jose took the team honors with a two-three finish for Lucas and teammate Jeff Glenn. Joe Giroski of Team Woodland won the S2000 category, and San Diego's Ian Wood took second.

In April the ACRL ran at Mesa Marin, Calif., in its first oval-track event since 1989. It was also the league's first televised race, one of three to be aired nationally on Speedvision. Zarcades scored his second pole but again crashed, as 1995 U.S. Formula Ford 2000 oval track champion Memo Gidley took over Brad Krause's Team Santa Barbara ride and wrested the win from Schader. Leo Sismani won the S2000 division, with Santa Barbara's Tom Bungay second. San Diego took its first of an eventual five team wins.

Returning to Mesa Marin on Memorial Day weekend, Schader captured the pole and led San Diego teammates Marc Zurlinden and Margie Smith-Haas to an historic podium sweep and their second team victory. John Ostlund won S2000 honors, relegating the Giroskis to second and third in class.

The ACRL circus next appeared at the Rose Cup for the first of three stops at the Portland, Ore., track. Schader scored his second pole of the season, but contact with Reno's Rick Lee during the race forced him to pit for repairs,



Team San Diego's Bob Schader picked up five wins en route to winning the American City Racing League championship.

and he eventually finished 18th. Lee continued, chasing eventual winner Jeff Glenn to the checkered. Leo Sismani finished a strong third for Team Las Vegas, but San Diego took the team win by a single point with Zurlinden's fifth and S2000 driver Ian Wood's eighth. Joe Giroski was back on form, winning the S2000 class ahead of Wood.

Returning to Portland in July, Schader dominated, taking both poles and winning both halves of the double-header. Reno's Lee finished second in the first race, while Sismani and teammate Chris Ronson finished third and fourth to claim the team crown for Las Vegas. Joe Giroski scored his third victory in S2000, followed home by Team Wilsonville's Bill Bachofner.

Lee and Sismani swapped places in the second contest, while Glenn took fourth. Zurlinden's sixth-place finish and Schader's win gave San Diego a close team victory. Giroski again led Wood to the flag for S2000 honors.

The following weekend found the ACRL at Sears Point, Calif., running with the International Motor Sports Association. Schader was fastest in practice, but a slight miscue in qualifying damaged his aerodynamics, and Jeff Glenn took his first pole of the season. Schader took the win in a close finish over Glenn, clinching the driver's championship. Las Vegas' Ronson scored his first podium finish when Rick Lee ran out of fuel two laps from the end while lying third. Smith-Haas' fifth-place finish and Schader's win garnered the team victory for San Diego. Joe Giroski had his hands full with Team Fresno drivers John Ostlund and Eric Lunn, but eventually prevailed, leading Bachofner home after the Fresno team spun in a multiracer incident.

The first-ever Reno event produced the biggest field of the season, 29 entries. New

U.S. FF2000 champion Steve Knapp debuted the brand-new Carbir chassis, grabbed the pole position and led convincingly at the green flag, but he lost his front bodywork and crashed on lap 10. Hometown favorite Lee took the point on the restart with Most-Improved-Driver Sismani and Rookie-of-the-Year Zurlinden snapping at his heels. Lee took the win, followed by Gidley, Sismani, Lucas and Zarcades. Sismani's third and Zarcades' fifth won the team points for Las Vegas, but they were not enough to take the season win from San Diego. Rising Star award winner Joe Giroski managed his sixth win of the season, and Steve Romak, driving for Team Fresno in his first ACRL start, was second. Giroski won the S2000 title with father Leo second.

## 1996 ACRL POINTS STANDINGS

### DRIVERS

POS.	DRIVER	TEAM	POINTS
1	Bob Schader	San Diego	645
2	Rick Lee	Reno	622
3	Leo Sismani	Las Vegas	590
4	Jeff Glenn	San Jose	563
5	Chris Ronson	Las Vegas	526

### TEAMS

POS.	TEAM	POINTS
1	San Diego	1,357
2	Las Vegas	1,238
3	Woodland	1,025
4	San Jose	995
5	Santa Barbara	947

### S2000

POS.	DRIVER	TEAM	POINTS
1	Joe Giroski	Woodland	693
2	Leo Giroski	Woodland	594
3	Ian Wood	San Diego	531
4	John Ostlund	Fresno	440
5	John Bachofner	Wilsonville	380

Photo: John Blakemore