

DAVE DINSMORE/Special

Eddie Hill is confident after replacing aluminum foil wings on his racer with carbon fiber wings.

Hill plans to match world drag mark

52-year-old driver was first to beat 5 seconds

By Bill Robinson Staff Writer

COMMERCE, Ga. — Eddie Hill is in the Guinness Book of World Records as the fastest man racing the quarter-mile on water at 229 mph. But when his blown fuel hydro flipped at 217 mph, sinking to the bottom of Firebird Lake in Chandler, Ariz., three years ago, he began to re-examine his roots in drag

Now Hill, at age 52, has become the fastest man on land. He will compete in the \$772,000 Southern Nationals today through Sunday at

Atlanta Dragway. On April 9 at the Texas Motorplex near Dallas, Hill became the first drag racer to break the fivesecond barrier, traveling the quarter-mile in 4.990. This was akin to Roger Bannister first breaking the four-minute mile afoot in 1954. Hill also streaked to 288.550 mph, another record.

"I think we'll duplicate that and maybe better those times in Georgia," Hill said.

Hill is especially confident after

Southern Nationals

What: The eighth annual NHRA Southern Nationals, the third race of the 1988 Winston drag-racing circuit for Top Fuel, Funny Car, Pro Stock and seven Sportsman categories.

Where: Atlanta Dragway, Commerce, Ga., 50 miles northeast of Atlanta on U.S. 441, north of Interstate 85.

■ When: Today — Gates open at 8 a.m., qualifying and time trials at 11 a.m.-3 p.m; Friday and Saturday - Gates open at 7 a.m., qualifying and time trials at 8 a.m.-5:30 p.m., pro qualifying sessions at 11 a.m.-3 p.m; Sunday -Gates open at 7 a.m., final eliminations at 11 a.m.

Purse: \$772,450. Tickets: General admission — \$7 today, \$9 Friday, \$17 Saturday, \$25 Saturday; Pit pass — \$6 daily, no charge today; Reserved seating — \$28 Saturday, \$36 Sunday. Available at dragway or SEATS

replacing the alumnimum foil wings on his racer with carbon fiber

"It's space-age state of the art," able success.

he said of the new wings. "I thought the aluminum foils would work all right, but I 'wrinkled' seven of 'em. ... I finally realized that at the speeds we're running now that the

aluminum won't work." Hill, never a big name in drag racing until this year, has rocketed to the top of Top Fuel, the division with the greatest speeds in NHRA Winston Drag Racing Series. He is the apparent successor to the retired "Big Daddy" Don Garlits, the sport's largest legend. Garlits quit after the 1987 season, and Hill

picked up his sponsor. "It seems like everything I've done in my life has been to get to this moment," said Hill of the rec-

Hill leads Joe Amato of Old Forge, Pa., in the Top Fuel points standings. Third is Dick LaHaie, the '87 Winston champion. All three, along with Frank Bradley, Darrell Gwynn, Gene Snow, Jack Ostrander, Shirley Muldowney and others will compete in the Southern Nationals.

Hill is a real bowlegged Texas cowboy. A native of Wichita Falls, he took up horses long before drag racers, then motorcycles and boats.

Hill pulled out of drag racing in the early 1960s after consider-

His re-entry was difficult. Things were so bad three seasons ago he couldn't muster enough performance to qualify for the final 16 at races among top dragsters. And even last year, at Texas Motorplex, his home track, Hill could not answer the second-round call for a four-car Top Fuel run. After suffering a first-round engine failure, he simply didn't have enough spare parts to rebuild.

A friend, Bill Bishop, bought him an engine block and some spare parts. That was enough to get him into the final round of the last three NHRA events of '87. It also provided crew chief Fuzzy Carter with the wherewithal to begin developing a high-speed profile. The profile stood out boldly after Hill sizzled along the Texas quarter at 285.880 mph, then a record.

One thing led to another. Garlits retired, and in stepped Super Shops, the longtime Garlits sponsor, switching its money to the Hill

At the Gatornationals March 20 at Gainesville, Fla., Hill made history. Though he was elected to the NHRA Hall of Fame in 1978 for his exploits of the early 1960s, he won his first national event ever.

Bloom gets reprieve; hearing postponed

By Chris Mortensen Staff Writer

Sports agent Lloyd Bloom got a reprieve Wednesday when his pretrial hearing scheduled today was postponed until next week at the request of lawyers for Bloom's former associate, Norby Walters.

Walters' attorneys were granted the postponement to next Wednesday in Tuscaloosa County to enable them to study documents they have subpoenaed from the University of Alabama, Assistant Attorney Gener-

al Don Valeska said.

Walters and Bloom will stand trial May 9 for three misdemeanor charges stemming from payments to former Alabama basketball players Derrick McKey and Terry Coner. The charges are tampering with a sports contest, commercial bribery and deceptive trade practices.

Bloom failed to appear for arraignment March 16 and also intended to miss today's scheduled pretrial hearing, according to his attorney, M.L. "Mike" Trope.

Valeska said he expects Bloom to keep a promise and appear for arraignment next week. Trope said Bloom could not afford two trips to Alabama and would await the outcome of pretrial motions made by Walters' attorneys to dismiss the charges.

If Walters and Bloom are convicted of any charge, the state will seek restitution of \$250,000 Alabama forfeited in NCAA tournament money because of the agents' dealings with McKey and Coner.

Herock

From Page 1D

period during which the Bucs made the playoffs three times — the decision was a combined effort between him and coach John McKay.

The ruling trio at Suwanee is labeled as Herock, Campbell and executive vice president Taylor Smith. While Herock has more influence with the Falcons than he had before, Taylor Smith says Campbell "will still make the final decision" on the pick."

"It's Kenny's show to run," said Smith, "but he works for Marion."

Officially, Herock says, "The pick is the organization's to make, and there's one guy in charge. He's the one who has to make the decision."

As much as anything, the Smith family has been impressed with Herock's confidence. After spending so many years with either McKay or Davis, Herock has taken on a similar brashness. At the Senior Bowl last January, he told Taylor Smith during a discussion of personnel, "Don't worry. I'll get you the players."

His first player is Bruce, who can revive the Falcons' downtrodden defense with his pass rushing.

Although there has been speculation that the second pick will be for a wide receiver, one of the draft's deepest areas, Herock cites no specific position.

"Hey, we've got holes everywhere," he said. "By no means have we said it's definitely going to be a wide receiver."

Last season, the Falcons did as much as they could on the field to make Herock's job easier, finishing with the league's worst record and placing them at the top of each round. The Falcons come off a disappointing 1987 draft which produced quarterback Chris Miller in the first round and running back Kenny Flowers in the second, but also brought in major flops in the form of offensive tackle Ralph Van Dyke (fourth) and offensive guard Paul Kiser (sixth), both cut midway through training camp.

Disappointed with drafts all the way back to the team's second in 1967 and through the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Smiths have cited the scouting staff as a prime area that needs rapid improvement. Herock hired a completely new staff.

If Herock is not successful Sunday and Monday, it won't be because he didn't take the time. During the last two weeks, with Herock and his scouts making final grades on individual positions, daily meetings have run from 8 a.m. to almost 10 p.m. Lunch is brought into the draft room and, aside from bath-

room trips, nobody leaves the room. Herock has left phone messages stacked on his desk, taking the approach that nothing is more important than evaluating the players available.

"It's the way I've always done it," Herock said. "It's pretty much standard.'

Many of Herock's drafts at Tampa Bay were conducted under similar circumstances — a team drafting at the top and needing talent nearly from top to bottom. His best Bucs draft came in 1981, when he picked all-star linebacker Hugh Green in the first round and followed with another eventual All-Pro, running back James Wilder.

He has also had weak drafts. In 1979, after trading the Bucs' No. 1 pick to Chicago for defensive end Wally Chambers, Herock made two second-round choices — Oklahoma offensive guard Greg Roberts and Pitt wide receiver Gordon Jones who became disappointments. In the second round of the 1982 draft, he took defensive end Booker; Reese, a major bust.

How Herock fares in this draft might determine his future with the organization. Observers around the league see him moving into a general manager's role with the Falcons. Some think he already has the job without the title.

"You know his title," said Smith Sr., "but it seems he'll have more and more influence with whatever success he enjoys."

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Johnson

From Page 1D

a generation of black ballplayers thought would always be their only baseball life. "We took for granted that baseball would be segregated from then on," said Chico Renfro, a former teammate on the Monarchs.

In his own way, Robinson helped change even that, Renfro recalled. During one raucous bus. ride, which followed an exhibition victory against an armed forces team composed of major leaguers, the future Dodger, who had knocked in the winning run with an extra-inning double, shouted: "See, fellas, we can play as good as these guys.

Mrs. Hardin remembered life with the Black Crackers as being "not bad, but sometimes very bad.

We couldn't stay in the best places or eat in the best places," she said. But John Hardin, her husband,

thought it was important to sustain the team. "He always said that one of those days there would be majorleague baseball in this town. He kept it going to give jobs to people who wanted to play and show their

James "Red" Moore was one of those players. But he was already 30 years old by the time he was released from the Army in 1945. He remembers how, even then, children responded to Robinson when the Monarchs' bus rolled into town. "They would gather around and just listen," he said. "There was so much negativism around at the time, with teams having to stay in run-down hotels and get in and out of town before sundown, stuff like that. He was always positive. It was his biggest ambition to get to the majors, and people were

inspired by just talking to him."

Later, after Robinson and others who followed him had long since proved his claims that blacks were capable of playing in the majors, he often spoke fondly of his season with the Monarchs. His widow, Robinson, Rachel remembers nights when her husband would tell of how they remained "full of humor," she says, as their means of enduring reality.

She never heard him speak of his night as a Dodger in Atlanta and of how much he meant to the people who played as watched that afternoon. Rather, Jackie Robinson told her of how much the players, owners and followers of the Negro Leagues meant to him.

"He always said that without pioneers, we make no progress," Rachel Robinson said. "Those were the shoulders Jack stepped on to get to where he was going."

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