

**A Cheap Dime
Store Novel or
Badge # 12108 or
Twenty Miles in
31:58**

I had been observing Ed Slobod as he got out of Joe Wurt's truck after a course run. He didn't look very different from the way that I would expect an official Timer

**ED SLOBOD WITH JUST A
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to look. Hair, wind blown. Glasses, slightly askew. Nose, a bit red from looking out the window in the sun.

It must have been the eyes, yes!-- the eyes. Now that I look back Ed's eyes must have told the real story. They had a far-away- look with just a hint of - (what's the word I'm looking for) ---Terror!--that's it!--Terror. Ed slobod with just a hint of terror, way back in those wise old eyes. I know, its hard to picture, but just for this story, give it a try.

The time, --1600 July 11, 1987-- the place Taft California, The name's Chuck. My beat -- The Bosses Truck. --I'm an Official Timer.

The hairy legged group was huddled in the back of a small pickup truck. I know their faces, I know their names, Gary Ward second in command, tall shifty eyed, Julian Tamez, the hit men. Bot imported from Texas. Another, Don Vickers--met him before the race, said he was from Pasadena-- likely story. They knew if they didn't perform at

peak efficiency today da Boss would rub 'em out.

There he is -- the Boss! Transmitter in one hand Receiver in the other. He's ready for anything. He looks relaxed, lounging back on the bean bag. The little muscle over his left temple twitches. This is it. No second chance, this will be a record breaker. "Gary, cool off my arm rest" the order is crisp. The sun is starting down toward the Pacific, but the temperature is still in the high eighty's. Gary dives for the water bottle, pulls the trigger five times with the barrel pointed at a point about one and a half inches above the bosses head. The first water hits the hot bean bag balls up and dances around like a drop of a hot burner. The others hit the bag at precisely the right spot. They drop the temperature enough for the bosses arm to rest comfortably.

"Chuck", His voice cracks like a whip. "I'm almost ready, I need another 500 feet before we start".

I've been ready for thirty minutes. My throat feels like the sun is going to set between my teeth. My neck has a permanent crick, from staring straight up for half an hour, desperately trying not to loose sight of "Wiley" Everyone knows what it is. The boss has been carrying it around in a bass fiddle case for the last couple of days. He only takes it out when he's planning to use it,

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The other big gun, "Jolly" (only his enemies call him that, most call him Larry), has been

stalking the Boss for two days now. He figures its only a matter of time before he knocks him off. His Road Runner has been nipping at the heels of Wiley and the Boss is starting to get a little nervous.

Looking up again, the bosses regular timer "Slobod" called that area of the sky Wurt's corner. When he gets in that area, Wiley likes to climb and drift back across the hoopsight, behind the course.

Now Wiley's behind the start line. "You're behind the hoop, Boss, you can drop the hammer anytime," the words tumble out, I'm trying not to stutter. The Bosses lady is behind the wheel. She's got her long hair stuffed in an old hat. Her foot gently taps the accelerator. The super-charged engin springs to life. Her hand comes down hard on the gear shift lever. "Your on the course, Boss" my hand is shaking so hard that the stop watch almost feels alive.

"Get in and sit down" Jan says. She's normally a warm, soft spoken person, but when Wiley's running its all business. Her foot slams down on the accelerator, the rear tires scream in protest as 140 horse power try to pull the tar from the road. "Keep my heading" I hear from the open rear window. "Sure, Boss, steer a little right" The horn blares as we cross the firs mile marker and a voice barks, "Mile marker one" "keep my heading" "Yea! Boss a quarter mile to the firs turn" Jan gears down two and sets up a perfect four whjeel drift. "Up five" the voice from the rear drifts through the open window "up five" Jan echos the tires strain to maintain the traction.

Soon the sounds are starting to run together. Horn-"Steer left" - "Mile marker five" - "Up five-

Down ten".

I feel light-headed, am I starting to gray out? No one told me I needed a pressure suit. I look up to see Wiley cruising along side and about 2000 feet up. I try to focus on the ground speed indicator...55. Wiley is still directly over head.

"Down ten, - Down ten, - Stop!" "I got something I'm going to take her up".

The truck is off the road stopped, engine idling. Tom Cruise would have loved the Top Gun Quick stop maneuver.

"I've got to give it to you Jan, you really got the touch when it comes to driving this thing." She looks over at me a smile softens the line of her face. "I was born with a wheel in my hand" she says.

"O.K. Let's go, take her up to 30 Jan." We're off, the head rest on my side of the truck is really getting a work out. "Mile marker nine" "My God, we're half way there."

I feel a soft touch on my shoulder, "When I slam on the breaks, you jump out, sight the plane and jump back in--got it?" I nod a terrified "yes".

I hear the tires screaming for mercy before the bone shattering deceleration starts. The door flies open and I'm out of the truck before its come to a complete stop. "Where's Wiley" I shout. "Right under the sun" a voice from the back booms. I see the flash as a wing dips, the bird already starts its head long dash for home. "You're by the turn" I shout. An arm jerks me back inside the truck.

We're off, back down the same road, this time "I'm going to relax" I tell myself. The calls from the back are starting to make sense. The hum of the tires, the purring 140 horsepower

doesn't seem to intimidate me as much as it did on the way out.

"Mile marker seventeen" -- "Jan you are going to have to go flat out so we can get in front of the plane". I hear the engine race as Jan drops from fifth to third. I look up just in time to see a stop sign coming up fast--check out the ground speed--fifty five. I feel another four

drift and now I'm afraid to check the speed again, I know by the way my head is disappearing into the seat back, we are accelerating fast. Jan has her knee locked straight, foot fl on the floor with the throttle peddle under it. If women can have a steely look in their eye-Jan definitely has it.

"Mile marker nineteen" The soft touch on my shoulder again. If she kicks me out at this speed I'm finished! "Listen,--Chuck-- we are in front of Wiley-- you get out when I stop and find the plane. When you have it tell the Boss and catch the time. --O.K.? --Here we go! --Oh! --Byt the way--Chuck! Take the stop watch with you."

"Huh! -- O Yeh!"

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