



07 TEXAS MOTORPLEX

In 1981 a Funny Car driver watched a sponsor's wife leave a national event covered in tire smoke with her hair ruined. Five years later he poured the first all-concrete drag racing stadium in the world in a cow pasture in Ellis County.

A MAJOR LEAGUE SPORT IN LITTLE LEAGUE BALLPARKS

The Texas Motorplex was not born out of a love of concrete. It was born out of an embarrassment.

In 1981, Billy Meyer brought his sponsor to the NHRA Winternationals at Pomona. U.S. Tobacco executive Lou Bantle's wife arrived in a Rolls-Royce wearing a mink coat. She left covered in what the sport used to call Akron fallout, the rubber and smoke thrown off the starting line, with her hair destroyed by the downwash of a television helicopter.

Not long after, the same couple went to Daytona for a NASCAR race and were served champagne and caviar.

“I knew we had a major-league sport, but we were playing it in Little League ballparks. It was just stupid.”

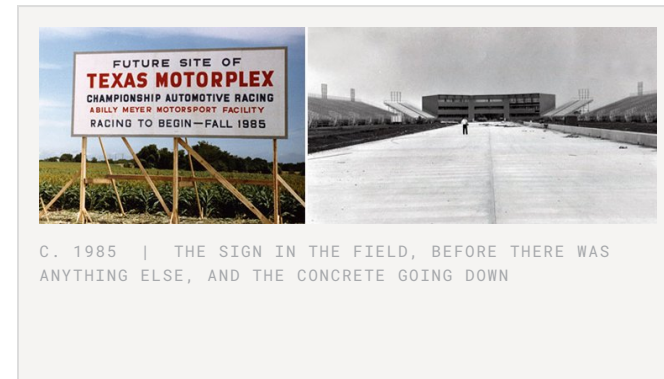
BILLY MEYER

That is the sentence the entire facility comes out of. Everything Meyer built at Ennis was an argument against that afternoon at Pomona, and he was explicit about who he was building it for.

“My goal was to service the three most important parts of the sport: the spectators, the sponsors, and the racers.”

BILLY MEYER

Every decision in the place follows from that list, in that order. And everybody told him he was crazy.



BILLY MEYER, FOUNDER AND BUILDER OF TEXAS MOTORPLEX

WHY ENNIS

Dallas-Fort Worth was one of the largest markets in America and had no major drag racing facility. Dallas International Motor Speedway had closed. Two parties announced plans to fix that: Meyer, and Kenny Bernstein with Norman Pearah. Meyer found the realtor, discovered their option had lapsed, and bought the land out from under them. He never built on it.

He built forty miles south of Dallas instead, and the two reasons he gives are not romantic ones. They are a promoter's reasons.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

“It was on a four-lane divided highway, and at the time, there wasn't a racetrack in America that was on a four-lane divided highway.”

“It was in a county of 50,000 people, so I could do an industrial bond loan.”

Then he spent months getting the property annexed into the Ennis city limits, because that meant legal footing on curfew and noise complaints. In 1985 he was defending a racetrack that did not exist yet against lawsuits nobody had filed. Forty years on, it still runs at night.

1,320 FEET OF SEAMLESS CONCRETE

Concrete had been tried before and it had a problem. Slabs need expansion gaps, and a gap is the last thing you want under a car making four thousand horsepower. Meyer went to VSL, a Texas post-tension specialist, and had the quarter mile poured as a single seamless surface, cables run through it and tensioned so it behaved as one piece: a **1,320-foot concrete launchpad** with nothing in it for a tire to find.

“Oil doesn't soak into concrete; it does in asphalt.”

BILLY MEYER

It is the same surface today. In four decades it has been ground exactly once.

“We're on our 30th anniversary, and all we've had to do was grind it one time.”

BILLY MEYER, 2015

WHAT THE SURFACE PRODUCED

On **April 9, 1988**, at the IHRA Texas Nationals, Eddie Hill ran **4.990** here. It was the first four-second pass in the history of drag racing, and he made it on seven cylinders after losing number seven at the launch. In October 1993, John Force ran 4.997, the first four-second Funny Car pass.



1986 | OPENING YEAR. EVERY SEAT FULL AND THE PARKING LOT OUT TO THE HIGHWAY.

HE BUILT A STADIUM

The word people reach for is racetrack. What Meyer built was a stadium that happened to have a drag strip in it, and the details give away what he was fixing.

THE ARGUMENT, IN DETAILS

Stadium seating wrapping the racing surface rather than strung along one side

A VIP tower straddling the track behind the starting line, with a tunnel running underneath it

More permanent restrooms than Texas Stadium - the home of the Dallas Cowboys - with attendants in all of them

Air-conditioned drivers' lounges, fully paved pits, full-matrix scoreboards, luxury suites, electronic timing

Counting the bathrooms at an NFL stadium and building one more is not an engineering decision. It is a statement about what a drag racing crowd is worth, made when nobody else was making it. Detail by detail, almost all of it became the industry standard, which is easy to miss now because every good facility built since has copied it.

FIRSTS

1986 - first all-concrete, stadium-style drag racing facility in the world

1997 - first facility with a permanent VIP hospitality structure

1997 - first non-NHRA-owned track to host two national events in a season

2004 - first NHRA track with starting-line balcony seating

OPENING DAY

The original business plan gave the place a 25-year lifespan. Meyer assumed noise abatement and suburban sprawl would eventually finish it.

It opened with a Division 4 event in August 1986 and immediately outran every projection anybody had made about it. Highway 287 backed up in both directions. Spectators parked on the medians, on the shoulders and in the fields.

“It looked like Woodstock.”

GLENN MENARD

The Chief Auto Parts Nationals followed that September, and the surface answered the question about itself in a single weekend.

Darrell Gwynn became the first Top Fuel driver into the 5.20s and the first over 275 miles an hour, running 5.280 at 278.29, then 5.261 at 278.55. Six cars qualified in the 5.30s or quicker, a record bubble at the time.

Kenny Bernstein became the first Funny Car driver into the 5.40s at 5.425, alongside a record 16-car field. Worth sitting with: the man whose racetrack Meyer bought out from under him set a national record on Meyer’s concrete the first time anybody raced on it.



TEXAS MOTORPLEX | THE TOWER, THE SUITES AND THE STADIUM SEATING BILLY MEYER BUILT

THE FACILITY TODAY

Texas Motorplex is still family owned. Christie Meyer Johnson serves as co-owner and general manager. The concrete her father poured in 1986 is still the racing surface. The facility runs March through November, anchored by the NHRA Texas Fall Nationals and the Stampede of Speed festival built around it, and annual prize money across the property exceeds \$2 million.

The Champions Club is a 9,600 square foot banquet hall taking groups from 50 to 450. Suites are climate controlled with full catering, closed-circuit feeds, WiFi, tower access and VIP parking. The starting-line balcony seating is the only outdoor version on the NHRA tour.

“The World Series of Pro Mod belongs in Texas, and we couldn’t be more excited to welcome it to the historic Texas Motorplex. It’s an honor that Wes chose to partner with us, and we’re ready to roll up our sleeves and help grow this event into something even bigger than anyone imagined.”

CHRISTIE MEYER JOHNSON - CO-OWNER AND GENERAL MANAGER, TEXAS MOTORPLEX



BILLY MEYER AND CHRISTIE MEYER JOHNSON, CO-OWNER AND GENERAL MANAGER OF TEXAS MOTORPLEX

WHY IT MATTERS THAT THE RACE IS GOING THERE

Billy Meyer poured concrete in a cow pasture because he believed drag racing was a major league sport being played in minor league buildings, and everybody told him he was crazy. Thirty-one years later, Drag Illustrated put \$100,000 on a Pro Mod race, turned the scoreboards off and invited sixteen drivers to a mountain in Colorado. A good number of people said the same thing. In March 2027 those two ideas end up in the same place.