

don't you know?" another voice breaks in. "That be J.D. Stewart's boys."

Now it turns out that it isn't a war. It isn't even an emergency. It's just Sheriff J.D. Stewart of Catoosa County, Georgia, saving time while obliging photographer Humphrey Sutton and me by running up to the Tennessee line so we can get a group photo—eight white Trans Ams, nine deputies, and the sheriff, posed in front of a sign that reads, "Welcome to Georgia, State of Adventure." The sign seemed more than appropriate and the ambulance, well, the ambulance just happened by in time to lead the parade.

Barney Creech isn't the first trucker to be "plum amazed" by the sight of a Trans Am painted up like a patrol car, though he may be among the first to see all eight of them at one time. Folks who live in northwest Georgia and south-central Tennessee have become accustomed to the idea of smokeys in sports cars, and for many of them, Sheriff J.D. Stewart is a source of local pride and nearly a living legend.

I must admit that, initially, the idea of a sheriff's posse in Trans Ams seemed plausible only in a Burt Reynolds movie. But then Sheriff Stewart and his deputies might have come right out of a Burt Reynolds movie. They not only fulfilled, but also eclipsed every fantasy I've had about the "good-ole-boy," *Thunder Road*, *Last American Hero*, rum-runnin' South. And it turns out that Stewart isn't just a sheriff, he's a funeral director, too. And he's also the father of another source of Catoosa County pride: J.D., Jr., a 270-pounder who runs the 50 in five seconds flat, is likely to be



playing center for the Dallas Cowboys after one more year of college, and is known affectionately as June Bug.

"The rum-runnin' is pretty much over now." The sheriff, a teetotaler, takes a long pull on his iced tea in the bar of the Choo Choo Read House in Chattanooga. "We got the last of the Sutton boys back in the early Sixties," he muses, sounding a little sad about it. "I had to supply my own car in them days, and I ran a GTO," he says in response to my question about what led him to Trans Ams. "I always liked Pontiacs. They give me good service, so I've stuck with 'em ever since."

When he came out of the navy in 1946, he spent ten and a half years as a Georgia state trooper. "We rode motors back then, Harleys, and drove '46, '47, and '48 Fords." He leans back in his chair like a poker player who's just laid down a winning hand. "You know the best patrol car I ever drove? Before my GTO, I mean?" He bends close across the corner of the table, bringing me eye to eye with his diamond-studded Shriner's tie tack, and pauses dramatically. "A '40 Ford coupe."

"But why Trans Ams?" I ask, feeling a little self-conscious about sipping the vodka and tonic I'd ordered before I

was privy to the sheriff's views on liquor and its consumption.

"Well, it operates cheap and it don't take you all day to get there. Just like any sports car, it don't kill you to drive it. You let up on the gas and it'll pull back so you don't have to use the brakes so much." He winks at me and takes another sip of iced tea. "Now that GTO was gutty, but you needed two hands and three feet to keep it on the road. I found that out one night rum-runnin' Junior Johnson over on the Tennessee side."

"The Junior Johnson?"

"He's a good ole boy and a pretty good sport." The sheriff winks again. "He took out about a dozen mailboxes over on the East Ridge before we was through."

"But how do the taxpayers feel about the Trans Ams?" I'm trying to get at the obvious question without coming off like Howard Cosell.

"Hell, they should be happy." He grins with satisfaction. "I go right to the top at Pontiac and get the best deals. A patrol car should be the ultimate. We asked Pontiac to fix us up with a LeMans police package that'd give us what we need, but they couldn't do it without violating the emissions standards. So they said, why don't you take Trans Ams. We said we couldn't afford 'em,

