

Benny & Hills 200 Mile Scramble

August 31, 1997 dawned cloudy, but with the promise of a perfect day. Within an hour it was sunny and beautiful. Forty-two pre 1934 Vintage Speedsters were lined up at the start line. Fords, a few Chevrolets, one Dodge and several with a combination of parts were lined up in the numerical order that was drawn at registration. The cars gleamed with polished brass shining. Drivers milled around with anticipation of the start of the Endurance run.

At the drivers meeting it was announced that the Benny Hills scramble would begin with a Le Mans start. Drivers stood facing their cars. When the starting flag was dropped they ran to start their cars and roar off under the starting banner. Dust flew and two first time Endurance participants were the first cars out. Phil Horine was the first out the parking lot. He was followed closely by Tim Good. Behind them was a blur of brightly colored Speedsters. In less than three minutes the parking lot was empty.

The noisy Vintage Speedsters jolted the quiet little town of Coburg, Oregon awake. In a few minutes the peace was restored as all forty-two cars passed through the tiny town. Coburg is a historical site established in 1847. Antique shops line the tree lined streets. The stores wait for customers to find old treasures. This morning nobody gave the shops a second look.

The cars sped by farmland and along the beautiful McKenzie River. In a few minutes it was like you had gone back in time twenty years. Old farm equipment was left beside an old barn. They probably still farmed with the weathered tractors. Forested lands with no houses or sign of civilization sprung up as the speedsters zoomed along the paved, secondary roads. The trees enveloped them in quiet except for the noise of their engines. The roads narrowed as they entered Bureau of Land management areas. Occasional clear-cut areas stood out, appearing barren. Closer inspection revealed new trees peeking out of, and around tree stumps. It will take many years to renew the forest lands. Better forest management started a few years ago. Now selective cutting preserves the natural beauty of the woodlands.

Up a narrow paved road the speedsters drove. At a turn in the road a checkpoint turned the cars back down the same road. It must have looked like ants if viewed from above. Cars met each other going up and down the same road. One car broke down. A few miles later the road was another checkpoint at the Wendling Covered Bridge. Wendling in the 1930s was the site of one of the largest largest sawmills in the Northwest. Nothing now. Bill Hills took pictures as the cars exited the bridge. About two miles later was another covered bridge, this one was a one way bridge. Ben McConnell took videos as the cars emerged from this bridge.

After the two covered bridges was a pit stop at a picturesque picnic area. Juice and muffins gave drivers and mechanics nourishment for the mountain roads that lie ahead. The trees were so thick overhead they gave a green canopied effect. Small creeks babbled along the side of the road. I had driven over this road many times earlier and had seen deer, elk and numerous small animals.

Check point number three was in the Sweet Home City Park. I marked cards and pointed out two restored covered bridges. One had been used during the Thirties for automobiles and one smaller one was used for foot traffic. We lost two more speedsters to mechanical failure. It was warm and sunny. Flowers bloomed by the bridges. It was a peaceful park. As the old cars roared off I knew they would

enjoy the view from a small mountain that was about five miles from checkpoint number three. It overlooked small farms in a quiet valley. Even though it was Sunday, the day before Labor Day, several farmers worked in their fields. And, of course, the expected dirt and gravel roads loomed ahead. They were nestled in hills with "kissing trees". These are trees that meet above you. Cows, Horses, Llamas, Sheep, Goats and other farm animals behind fences must have wondered what all the noise was about. Not too many cars traveled these back roads. People along the route gave friendly waves and smiles. Lunch stop was check point number four. We had lost another car. Bar -B-Q sandwiches, baked beans and salads were lunch faire. The quaint little city of Brownsville was where lunch was served.

After lunch flat land gave way to gentle rolling hills. And then came a hill climb. Ben stood at the top taking videos. All cars zoomed over the top, only to find gravel as soon as they crested the hill. Another check point after a few miles.

Then came the steep mountain road. As your ears "popped" a checkpoint slowed everyone down for the sharp decent. More curvaceous, scenic, winding roads took us back toward Coburg. One more car had mechanical problems.

At the next to last checkpoint was a reproduction of a 1930's garage. It was complete with old gas pumps and a rusting Model "A" pickup in the shelter of the garage The fanner was very gracious and had allowed us to take snapshots the day before the run, and had moved all his farm equipment out of our way for the check point.

At the finish line everyone was checking their new "speedster" watches to see what time a friend or relative was completing the Endurance Run. There had been seven breakdowns, but everyone had made it safe and sound.

At the evening awards banquet there was another "Benny Hills" scramble. Instead of going to the buffet line by tables, we called car numbers and drivers, mechanics and friends connected with that cars would go to the buff et line. When about one third of the people had gotten their food we announced that there would be another "Benny Hills" scramble. We yelled GO and the remaining people ran to the dinner line. This must be a first. Having a Le Manes start for dinner. Robin Pharis and son Kevin of California was the winner. George Olson also from California, placed in the number two position. Number three place was Dick and Holly McCartney from Washington State. In the fourth spot was former MTFCA board member Tom Elliott and present MTFCA board member Chuck Kroll, riding as mechanic.

The Vern Storey Memorial is a trophy that is awarded to the person who best reflects the attributes of Vem Storey: Humor, Willingness to help, Desire to finish, Safety and Promoting the spirit of Speedsters. I was speechless when I was this year's recipient. I have never in my life been for a loss of words. I was very humbled and proud to receive the award. Northwest Vintage Speedsters have an annual Labor Day Endurance Run. Next year will be in Mt Vernon, Washington. It will be hosted by the MTFCA Puget Sound Chapter.

The forth annual Memorial Day run will be hosted by the Ed Jepperson of the Spokane model "T" Ford Club of America.