

Road Test Road Test



1920 Speedster Undergoes an “Oprah Like” Makeover

Kennewick, WA—The Three Rivers Chapter of the MTFCA hosted the Northwest Vintage Speedster Memorial Day Weekend Event running a 200-mile Endurance Run for pre-1934 four-cylinder speedsters. Dubbed “Desert in Bloom” the run proved why the “Tri-Cities” is often referred to as the “Dri-Cities.” It was HOT!! Event coordinator DaJuan Kimbell promised to “Run em’ hard, feed em’ good, and have fun” and lived up to it. Thirty-two cars entered the event and all finished running and eating their way over the 178-mile route. It was also the “coming out” event for #40, a 1920 Model T Speedster, that spent the last year undergoing a complete body configuration change. After twenty-five years of endurance runs with a lightweight “bug” style body, an all-metal body was custom fabricated to comfortably accommodate the driver and navigator. The chassis for the most part remained unchanged save for a steering box mod.

Speedster enthusiasts from four Northwest states descended upon the Tri-Cities in order to renew friendships and take part in the annual event. Part of the fun is to view the “new” cars that may make their debut. Kevin Pharis from Folsom, California often navigated for his Dad in the past. This year he brought a “Speedy” 4-wheel disk brake equipped # 171 Model T Speedster that he could drive himself. His navigator Matt Ryan, is working on one as well. Both boys seemed to grin from ear to ear all weekend long talking about, and driving, the windshield-less car collecting bugs in their teeth for their etymology unit in Science 101. Flint and Angela Olsen of Victor, Montana showed his Dad how to place in the top five in their first event in car #39. One of the better finishes for a Rookie driver and navigator. Rae’cing Murray unveiled her “new” speedster with all the pomp and circumstance saved for presidential inaugurations. The theme from “*2001 A Space Odyssey*” blared over her stereo system while her designated driver backed #40 out of the covered trailer. Like Rocky Balboa from the famed “*Rocky*” movies, #40 rolled out looking like a “champion” in a new all-steel body covered in shiny fleet blue paint from the Kenworth Truck factory. But, the true test of a new car is the 200 miles that lay ahead for all the competitors.

Saturday saw all the entrants arrive and unload to place their vehicles in the “Tech Inspection” line up queue. The inspectors go over each car with a fine toothed comb looking specifically for items that may be unsafe or become unsafe without attention. It is a good thing to have a second set of eyes review each car to ensure the safety of the participants. It was during the “Tech” that #40 was rolled out. It was the first time that Rae’cing had a chance to see the car up close and ride in it. Like all the other cars in the event it was approved to participate.

A great Hospitality Room with plenty to eat and drink brought relief for starving and overheated participants. A roped off parking area became a “gallery” of speedsters for some of the locals to enjoy. A NWVS general membership meeting preceded a “warm-up” tour. With temperatures nipping the 100-degree mark it didn’t take long to warm up. The #94 Model T Speedster owned by Paul Murray was the first victim as his 2-speed Ruxtell rear end refused to shift into high gear. Don Shreve in car #130 developed what he thought was a fuel pump problem. It cleared up and he ran the rest of the Saturday route with out incident. The group pulled over near the location of the Columbia River Unlimited Hydroplane Races in a shady spot to get some relief from the searing heat. It was at this time that Padre Jepperson convened a special funeral service for the former body of #40. The wooden body parts were transported in a container carrying the ashes from the cremation. After a short sermon, Padre distributed the ashes in the roadway so that all the speedsters could participate in sending the ashes off in a cloud of dust. It was a fitting location since “Kennewick Man” was unearthed nearby.

Sunday the weatherman promised some cooler temperatures with a chance of Thundershowers. Cooler in Kennewick is the upper 80’s. Except for a few drops of rain the showers never fell. The cloud cover did provide some relief. After the customary Driver’s meeting the starting flag fell at 8AM. The route traveled immediately west out of Kennewick through West Richland turning north into desolate western Benton County. Roads names like “Bombing Range Rd” reminded participants of the WWII and Cold War past of the Tri-Cities. Paved and gravel roads alike were in good shape and easily traversed. An interesting note is that by time participants got to the gravel they were spread out enough that dust was a non-factor. The wind blew most of the dust off the road immediately too. Halfway to lunch the group was treated to coffee, juice and bagels. A most necessary stop for bodily relief in all ways. Accumulating mileage can be difficult with a lack of usable roadways, so DaJuan had us turning every square mile before lunch at the Roza Canal Winery. A delicious salmon BBQ with all the trimmings filled in the empty cavities. The talk at lunch was how nice the gravel was and how bad the paved roads were. After lunch the 2nd half maps were passed out.



Rudy Saarela patrols the competition looking for an edge at the start of the “Desert in Bloom” 200-mile Endurance Run.



Beth Horine looks like she is on a mission to win the “Desert in Bloom”

A terse DaJuan admonished everyone to fill up with gas after lunch since there will not be any services where you are going. Her promise came true as the route headed south through Grandview across I-82 into the Horse Heaven Hills. Glade Rd provided the afternoon hill climb challenge. A steep, switch back laden, 2-lane highway tested radiators and cornering suspensions. It was fun!! At the top, the route headed back east along the ridge top. The gravel road seemed to go on forever with out a soul in sight. The next paved road was Weber Canyon Rd that was like a descent into hell. The afternoon temp was turned up a notch or two as the canyon walls radiated the day’s heat. It was a good thing that it was down hill. A couple more turns had the group heading back into West Richland and cooling down along Columbia River Drive. Flagger Fred Reichlin welcomed the hot, dusty, drained and dehydrated folks across the finish line. Coolers of adult beverages and water were as welcome as a cool breeze. The talk around the finish line was the afternoon route and wondering how many went to Oregon on an unmarked road. Evidently, only one car guessed wrong and went south instead of north. This event finished up around 3pm so folks had a lot of time to rest and recuperate from the grinding course before heading for bench racing cocktails and dinner. It was there that we found out how cars #380, a 1928 Chev Speedster, had to use an “ingenious” fuel pressurization system just to finish.



There was a lot of gravel roads but they were good ones on the “Desert In Bloom”

The top ten finishers included rookies and folks that have a lot experience with endurance runs. All three of the new cars finished the route, but only one was in the top ten. Kevin Pharis pushed his car to its limits for the whole run and finished first, but way too early and was deep in the standings. Rae'cing Murray navigated for the first time in three years finding all the checkpoints, plus didn't get lost, but took an extra 26 minutes than the preset time to finish 19th. She said "numbaa" 40 was impressive for comfort and roominess. No cooling, oiling, or fueling problems either. Flint Olsen drove #39 to a 4th place finish. His navigator didn't miss a checkpoint and unlike Dad, went north instead of south on the unmarked road. The Oregon team of Don Shreve and Tim Knapp garnered 3rd place in the 16-valve Roof OHV powered Model T. Herb Mettler and his navigator took 2nd in his Model T Speedster. Veterans Bill and Jan Hills topped the group by being only 0:01:47 later than the preset time in their #72 Model T Speedster. The top 3 finishers will receive a shirt or windbreaker with the "Desert in Bloom" logo embroidered on it. Art Reichlin explained how his son-in-law, Steve Lindberg and navigator Karan, had to hook up a tire pump to maintain fuel pressure for much of the afternoon. With duct tape sealing and holding the pump hose over the vent hole the navigator would periodically pump air into the tank to keep the car going. For their finishing efforts they received the trouble trophy.



These people are happy to be finished with the "Desert In Bloom"

The "Desert in Bloom" proved to be a great road test for both people and machines. The routes were challenging and a good mix of terrain to make things interesting. Special mention should be made for the heroic efforts of Kennewick resident Frank Baker. Seems Frank opened his shop to the visitors more than once. Wayne Murray stopped in to drill a vent hole in a gas cap. Paul Murray dropped by to weld his Ruxtell shifter lever. That did not work, so Frank donated the shifter lever out of his 1924 Model T Touring for the weekend. Frank Reichlin broke a chassis part during the weekend and managed to get it welded and reinstalled in Frank Bakers' shop. It was one busy place! Our thanks to Frank for his generosity and willingness to help stressed out folks in every way possible. DaJuan, and the Three Rivers Chapter of the MTFCA, are to be congratulated for putting on another very successful Northwest Vintage Speedster Event.



Win or lose the best part is eating and bragging about your car and how well it ran in the “Desert In Bloom” Memorial Day Weekend Endurance Run.