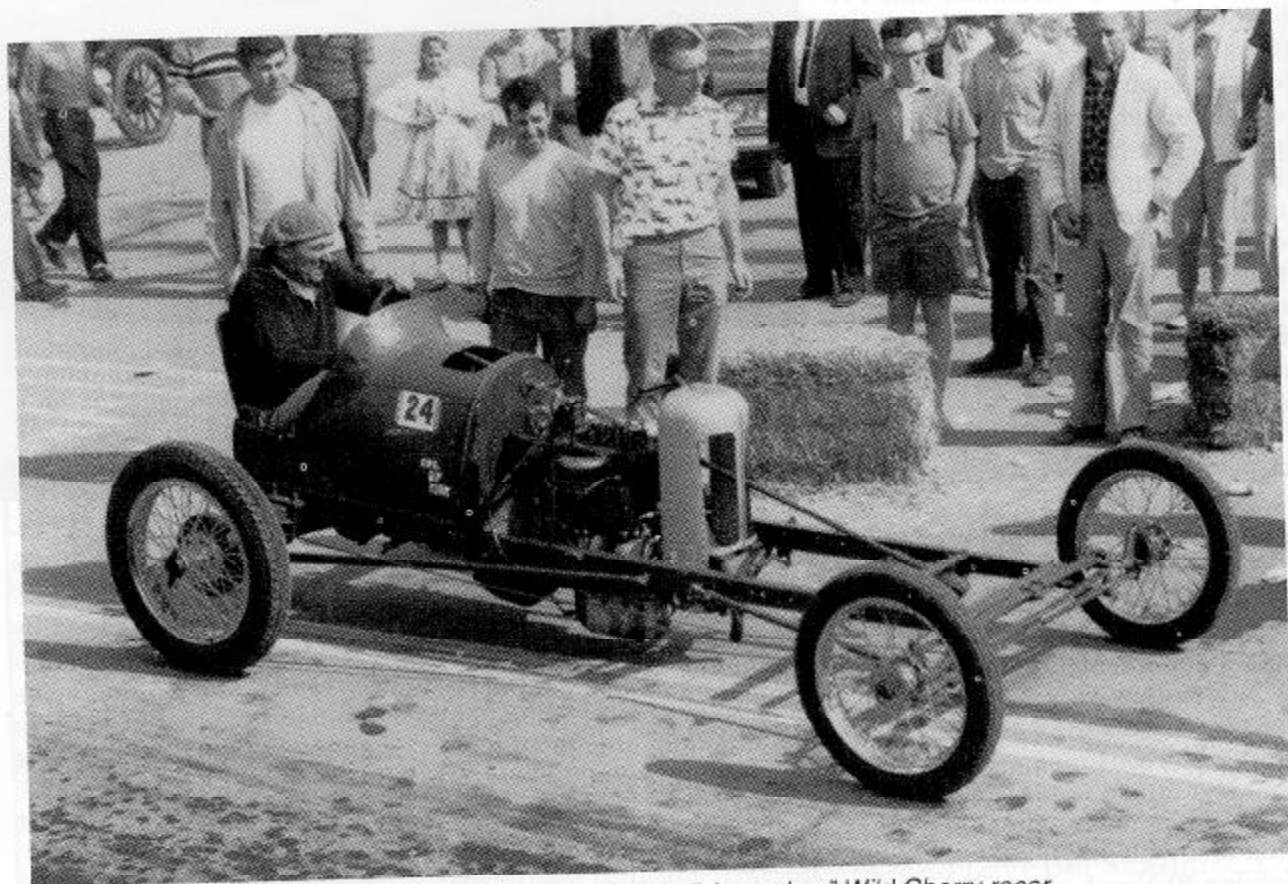


# Chris Egsgaard

a.k.a. Billy Poobah

1920-2002

by Jay Klehfoth



Chris Egsgaard behind the wheel of the "cleaned up" Wild Cherry racer  
at the Long Beach Hill Climb in the early 1960s

Bruce McCalley Photo

Without a doubt, Chris Egsgaard was one of the most colorful characters who ever carried an MTFCA membership card. Actually, let me revise that—he was one of the most colorful people who ever walked the earth. He was also, much to his glee, quite controversial.

Chris was a frequent contributor to the *Vintage Ford*, but was most proud of his creation of the mythical character, William Osgood Pohbowski, later known as Billy Poobah. Billy Poobah was reported to have been the greatest, but least known race driver of the '20s. For those unfamiliar with Billy, he was reported as the winner of the Indianapolis 500 in 1924. Unfortunately, due to a mix-up in directions, he ran the race in Akron, Indiana and was denied the recognition he deserved. It was Chris who was pictured in the *Vintage Ford* on

various occasions as Billy Poobah. Chris also was the creator of Moose Berkewitz, the inventor of the sintered bamboo piston pins, the sonic balancing theory (which enabled engines to run at speeds beyond the breaking point), and balsa wood head gaskets.

I first met Chris at the MTFCA's Rocky Mountain High National Tour in July 1989. Chris brought his Model T-powered Pietenpol airplane and was on his way to Oshkosh, Wisconsin for the "fly in." Having inside information, I knew that Chris was the creator of Billy and Moose. After listening to several of his stories detailing his various escapades, I was convinced that the creative imagination that had created the mythical characters was manifesting itself in the stories he swore were true. Later, I would talk to him and hear even

more stories. My initial impression was that he couldn't have possibly experienced or accomplished all the things he said he did. In my mind, I branded him as a kook—although a great story teller. Over time, however, his various stories of his life were all validated by other sources as absolutely true.

While I knew Chris and visited him at his home, there was so much about him that I didn't know. I turned to Chris's friends Howard Genrich, Jim Cullinane, and Bruce McCalley for some help in describing Chris. "Unique" seems to be the common thread each used. Some of his accomplishments and idiosyncrasies are outlined below:

- He served in WWII in the Pacific as a crew member of landing craft and participated in several invasions.
- After the war, Chris spent a couple of seasons on the dirt track circuit racing Model T-powered racers.
- Chris was President of the Model T Ford Club of Southern California in 1959.
- He built and flew a Pietenpol Sky Scout airplane powered by a Model T engine (see *Vintage Ford* Vol. 18 No. 3, May-June 1983). When everyone gathered at the MTFCA's Annual Meeting in 1983 aboard the Queen Mary in Long Beach, California

Chris's airplane was on display at the dock. "Got permission to land in the parking lot at 7 this morning," he said. A few believed him.

- He won the "King Of The Hill" title and crown at the Long Beach Hill Climb in 1960 and 1973.
- He was an avid bicyclist and would ride his bicycle from Reseda to Long Beach for the Model T meetings and then back—fifty miles one way. He rode his bicycle from California to his 50<sup>th</sup> high school class reunion in Minneapolis. He rode coast to coast across the US in 1976.
- He worked on both sides of the camera in Hollywood.

Chris was a friend of Ed Winfield and was an expert on Winfield carburetors. Articles penned by Chris included detailed information on Winfield carburetors and some of the unique Model T-based engines Winfield produced. He also produced an interesting chronicle of Ed Winfield's life. (See *Vintage Ford* Vol. 21 No. 4, July-August 1986 issue.)

Chris also had a wonderful collection of Ts, racing parts and accessories, and literature that he willingly showed anyone.

He was truly unique and will be missed by his friends and this club. Farewell, Billy! □



The July-August 1981 cover: "World champion Model T Ford racing car driver Billy Poobah and his D.O. Fronty. Billy is demonstrating to a couple of unsuspecting visitors, Tony S'Gro and Teddy Tate how he 'stuck it through the firewall' when he set fast time back at Indy."