



The Baja "1000"

By ED ARCHER

The 1973 Baja Mil (1000) was held on November 6, 7, 8 and 9; promoted by the Sports Committee (Comite de Promociones - Turisticas, A. C.), a non-profit organization whose proceeds went to the children and youth of Baja California.

The event was run over an 875 mile course, starting in Ensenada and finishing at La Paz, Capitol of the Territory of Baja California Sur. Of the 875 mile course, approximately 160 miles were on pavement; the rest of the route being unpaved.

All vehicles were required to pass ten check points between the start and finish. These were located at Ojos Negros, Valle de la Trinidad, San Felipe, Hotel Mint's Punta Final, Bilstein's Bahia de Los Angeles, El Arco, San Ignacio, Ejido Cadeje, La Purisima, Ciuolad Constitucion. The Committee furnished 100 octane fuel at the check points except for Ejido Codeje where fuel was supplied for motorcycles only.

Each vehicle was timed individually. The maximum time allowed for one to be considered a finisher was forty-eight hours.

This account of the race was submitted on tape; the following is the editor's interpretation of that tape.

Many of you may remember the article on the Model T entry in the 1972 Baja 1000 race.* Entitled 'Dearly Departed Spokes' it told of the Ford's failure early in the race due to a broken wheel. "Wait 11 next year" was the general pitch of that story.

Well, the Baja 1000 for 1973 is history, and the Model T Ford is a part of that history. Completed the race? No, but came to within 200 miles of the finish, well ahead of time, and ahead of over 100 cars that had failed along the way! The failure? A broken steering spindle arm! The Model T engine never missed a beat on the entire trip; didn't use enough water to measure (modern-core radiator); all wheels intact - in fact far less trouble than one might expect from even a modern car.

Other than replacing the wheels with old-stock, genuine Ford wooden wheels, changing the oil and making a few routine checks, the car was just as it was after the 1972 race. The car had not been driven since that time. Spare parts were loaded - including twenty-

* Volume 8, Number 1, page 28 (1973).



The racer as it appeared before the race in the Ensenada Ford dealer s showroom.

four spare spokes -just in case!

Larry Streeter and I, along with our wives, trailered to Ensenada. The girls were going to take the modern road south to La Paz and meet us when we came in. Arriving in Ensenada on the evening of the 5th, we ran across the Ford agency there and had the brilliant idea that this would be a good place to store the car overnight - in the showroom. We entered and found an English-speaking Mexican. We explained to him that we usually charged a good sum for displaying our car but that in this case we would consider it a fair, even, exchange. Before we were finished talking they were moving the new cars out of the showroom to make room.

November 6th was the day for registration. While we were listed as an entry, we had not been assigned a number. In checking we found that motorcycle number "1" had cancelled, and since "1" was already painted on the hood, we took it. This would have given us the number one starting position, but we elected to leave last rather than risk being run over by the faster cars.

The race began at about 8 A.M. on the 7th, with the motorcycles leaving first, at one minute intervals. It was almost noon before we were at the line, and there was a five minute delay while pictures were taken of our unusual entry. A number of spectators asked if we were really going to run the course or if we were planning to take the new highway. We assured them that we were there to race, and were dead serious.

We were dressed in "costume, had knickers and racoon coats, plus a ukulele for entertainment - and a little "atmosphere.

Initially the road is paved and quite good and we made very good time to the first check point. The people at the check point were quite surprised to see us,

and commented that even at our late arrival (we started late, remember?) we were ahead of Parnelli Jones, who had broken down already. We had driven at better than fifty miles per hour on this first segment.

Our next check point was Valle de La Trinidad, which we reached with no problems. Here again the people were amazed to see us; few had expected us to make it this far, let alone in such good time.

From here we headed for the third check point in San Felipe. Arriving there we decided we ought to check the oil and water. We needed neither.

We headed out again. The further we went, the poorer the roads became. At places we could hardly make five miles per hour. Rocks and extremely narrow roads, plus the darkness (it was nighttime by now) made it very difficult. We ran across a lady driver who lived in this country, and who had entered the race, who was lost, and *headed in the wrong direction!* You can imagine how bad the roads were.

Along this road we broke the main leaf in the front spring. Rather than take the time to replace it (we had a spare) we clamped it up with vise-grip pliers and bailing wire and headed on. The bracket which held our carbide generator broke and we almost lost that. The generator was just for effect. We were using small quartz-iodine driving lights, mounted inside the brass headlamps, for the headlights. These proved to be excellent; even when one of them failed, the other one gave more than enough light.

We pulled into Check Point Four at Punta Final early in the morning. Here we replaced the front spring with the willing help of some of the natives. We had had one flat tire so far, not bad when you consider the roads we had covered.

The further we went, the more surprised they were to see us. As bad as the roads had been, we were warned that the worse was yet to come. We were given little or no chance of reaching El Arco. We had been hearing this all along the route, so gave it little attention.

The road was poor, with lots of rocks and shale. There were steep and narrow roads along the hills. At one point we met some people in a four-wheel drive vehicle who offered to pull us up with their winch. They said we



Larry Streeter (L) and Ed Archer the day before the race.



The road between Bahia de Los Angeles and El Arco. Note the quartz-iodine headlamps mounted inside the brass lamps.

couldn't make it without help, and that even if we did, it was worse further down the road. Well, we made it. We did have some trouble with the gasoline supply due to the steepness of the hills but nothing serious. The Ford just pulled like it was born for the job. Along this stretch we had another flat tire but decided to just run on it since it seemed to run just as well flat. This, of course, ruined the tire - but what the hell!

They were just amazed to see us when we finally pulled into El Arco. Our wives were there to greet us. While they were supposed to continue on down to La Paz, they had been told that our chances of getting this far were almost nil and that they should stop here so that they wouldn't have to back-track so far to get us.

The road in to El Arco (from the main highway) was not much better than the one we had used. After some advice from the local people, the girls decided that they would follow us, rather than taking the road back to the highway, since the race course was equal to or better than the road out.

It was just as well. We left in a cloud of dust and headed south. About five miles out we broke the steering arm (for the first time). We were well ahead of the girls and so pulled over and took the front axle apart. We had the spindle off by the time the girls pulled in. We took the truck back to El Arco. Bill Strop's crew had welding equipment there, and we persuaded them to weld it up for us. They were a little reluctant at first but finally



Another view of the same highway.



Entering El Arco.

relented and did a fine job. We returned to the racer and installed the spindle, and again left the girls in a cloud of dust.

We ran into some heavy sand and just knew that the girls would get stuck there with the truck and trailer. We thought about waiting to help them through but decided to continue on. After all, we were in a race - and someone surely would come along and help them out anyway.

Finally we reached a paved road which headed into San Ignacio. We reached here about 10 P.M. the second day of the race. Being late, we had a difficult time locating the check point. Here again we were warned that the roads would get worse - and they were right! We got lost just finding our way out of town! To add to our problems, we lost the headlight. There were no markings anywhere (that we could see). We drove for an hour or so and the road just faded off into nothing. We headed this way, then that, and finally stopped and dug out our dime-store compass. The compass said we

Note the professional and authentic manner in which the front spring was repaired. It's a good thing they invented hay before they invented Fords - without bailing wire the Fords would never have survived.



Noting the sagging posture of our car, we began to suspect that something might be wrong. Between the two of us we came to the conclusion that the frame was cracked. Another spot restoration was performed.



When the spindle arm snapped for the second time, the race was over for us. 200 miles to go in about three hours was next to impossible. Here I stayed for two and a half days, waiting for Larry to come back with the spindle.



Note the bad sag in the car because of the cracked frame. We had a Muncie transmission behind the engine, and its mounting-bolt holes may have contributed to the failure.



The view down the road which I looked at for almost three days as I waited for Larry's return.



were heading north but this couldn't be right. We moved around the car to make sure that it wasn't effecting the reading, and finally, much against our better judgment, turned around and headed out. At one point we were clipping right along and literally dove into a five-foot hole in the road. We really hit it hard - so hard that we were almost thrown out of the car. The Ford just bounced on through. The ukulele we had been carrying flipped out and went right under the rear wheel. This was our greatest loss. The uke, plus our raccoon coats, had been our "trade mark" on the race. Whenever we had pulled into a check point, Larry would be picking on the uke and singing "Guadalajara." Anyway, this ended the musical portion of our journey. By about 4 A.M. we were certain we were back on the right road.

Along this road we discovered that the frame had broken. We had wondered just why the firewall didn't fit just right but had never really stopped to see what the problem was. The bottom and side of the rail had cracked, leaving just the top of the frame to keep it together. The body itself had prevented a total collapse. We looked around for a rock on which to set the jack so we could push the frame into alignment. Would you believe - after all the rocks we had run over and around we couldn't find one anywhere at this spot. Finally we dug out the spare spokes we'd been carrying and made a criss-cross sort of platform for the jack. Using two tire irons for splints, we wired the frame together as best we could. We were so tired by this time that it took the two of us, taking turns, to wrap the wire. After the repair we continued on for another twenty or so miles. It was real cold during the nights but with the coming of dawn things began to warm up and we thawed out.

About ten miles out of Ejido Cadeje the spindle arm broke again. The roads here were much better than the ones we had seen but apparently the arm had weakened and some small shock had finished the job. There was nothing we could do to repair the thing here and after some deliberation Larry decided to hike into Cadeje with the spindle and the flat tire (and wheel) to see if he could get them repaired there. I sat down in the passenger seat and fell asleep.

Later that morning a Dodge van, heading north, came by. They had met Larry along the road and had brought back the wheel because there was nothing in Cadeje in the way of repair facilities. Larry had continued on with the spindle. They said that they had offered him a ride; after they went north for about twenty miles to pick up their car (which had broken down) they were heading south again and could have taken him to La Paz.

This was the beginning of the third day. We hadn't eaten since before the start and I was getting pretty hungry. We had been so keyed up along the route that hunger never seemed to enter our minds, but just sitting there in the middle of nowhere seemed to draw attention to the pains in my stomach. We had carried some beef jerky but it was in the back of the car along with the oil, STP, gasoline, tools and parts. By this time the oil and STP cans had broken open and everything was a sticky ooze.

During the morning an airplane flew over and I got out of the car and waved, hoping to draw attention. They circled and to my surprise, dropped a parachute which contained water, fruit, some cookies and orange juice mix. It was no gourmet feast but it was mighty welcome at the time. We had met the people (so we found out later) the night before and they had mentioned that they would fly over the course to make sure we made it. Pretty nice people!

Two and a half days later (!) Larry returned, accompanied by two Mexicans, in a new flatbed truck. He had hired it to come in and carry the racer out. By this time it was too late to finish the race - the maximum time allowed was forty-eight hours. It seems that he had hiked to Cadeje, arriving at the same time that the guys in the Dodge van and their Baja car returned. They took him on to La Paz. There he found the wives, who had taken a motel there. In La Paz he learned of another man located in Ciudad Constitution who had a pickup truck and could get us out. Our truck had broken down, too, and had been left in Ciudad Constitution while the girls got a ride on to La Paz where they were to meet us.

They took a taxi for the (approximately) 100 mile trip. The taxi fee was fifty dollars, but the driver was so



Starting out in beautiful, restored condition, the 600 mile race has taken its toll. The car will need a complete restoration if it is to ever compete again. The damage has been to the chassis and body; the engine, transmission and rear end are in near-perfect shape and will

need little more than an oil change. Quite a reflection of the quality that went into the Model T Ford so many years ago. When you consider that this Model T did better than over one hundred modern vehicles, the achievement is even more impressive.

helpful in helping to locate the man with the truck that they tipped him another ten. The man there said his son, Raoul, would take them out to get our car, and off they went. Several flat tires later they finally gave up and went to sleep in the truck. Raoul seemed to have many connections and they pulled into another hamlet and got another truck; the one that they were in when they got back to me. We loaded the racer and headed back to Constitution, and the wives.

I had expected.

We are not planning to enter next year, unless we can get a sponsor. While the event is a lot of fun in many respects, it is just too costly and time-consuming for us to try again without help.

Here we had the truck repaired and also got the spindle arm welded again. We displayed the racer at a theater there (in exchange for a free show).

But who knows - we may be there anyway.

The girls had had their problems, too. They had been stuck in the sand as we thought they would. And as we had suspected, there was someone to get them out. The rough roads, though, had broken the trailer hitch and they had to leave it beside the road about 100 miles north. The universal joint went bad (but did not fail completely) and this was the problem we fixed in Constitution.

We decided that we would go back and get the trailer and so headed back up the road. To make a long story short, we could not find the trailer - it apparently had decided to become a Mexican citizen - or someone had made that decision for it. In any event, it was gone and so we took the front wheels off the racer and loaded it on the pickup. Having done this we headed north on the new highway, on our way home.

The race renewed my confidence in the Model T. It performed without a hitch, except for the above-mentioned problems. The engine and drive train never gave the slightest trouble. The car performed even better than

DESTINATION DEARBORN

The Tour is still on! Get your reservations in now!

A deadline of April 20 has been set for reservations to assure each participant a tour pack, dinner tickets, etc. While you may sign up after that date, we cannot guarantee you a place in every event, nor the tour pack. Sign up now to make sure you are "in."

The Ramada Inn tells us that they have all but sold out of the block of rooms reserved for the MTFCA. Some of the rooms have been reserved by people who have yet to register with the Club. If you are one of these it is very important that you let us know of your intentions. The rooms at the Ramada Inn are being held for participants only; failure to register with us may mean that you will not have the room when you get there.

Act now! Don't miss this greatest of all MTFCA National Tours. Remember, too, if the tour has to be cancelled because of the fuel shortage, you will get your tour deposit back. At this time we do NOT expect to cancel. Remember - **REGISTER BY APRIL 20!**