

SPEEDSTERS !!

Photos and Text by Bruce McCalley



With today's fifty-five-miles-per-hour speed limits, the high cost of gasoline and the general depression of the automotive market which has resulted from the fuel crisis, the average red-blooded man seems to have developed a "who cares" attitude when it comes to modern automobiles. Just a few years ago we all seemed to run down to the new-car showroom every Fall just to oogle the new models. New cars were a thrill then - better performance, styling, new features and ever-increasing reliability all tended to make us want to chuck the old beast and get the new.

Aside from the speed limits, fuel shortages, etc., the government's insistence on things they think we need - like shoulder belts, massive bumpers, endless "safety" features - many of which take the fun out of driving, reduce the economy and performance of the car - and greatly increase the cost of it - kill our desires.

No one can argue the obvious safety factor of a seat belt. Shoulder belts may be even better but one wonders if the addition of the shoulder belt has not caused many of us to give up the seat belt. The uncomfortable belt across the chest is an integral part of the seat belt system; you can't have one without the other. It has been the observation of this writer that this has been the case all too often.

Five-mile-an-hour bumpers may look good on paper but they look terrible on a

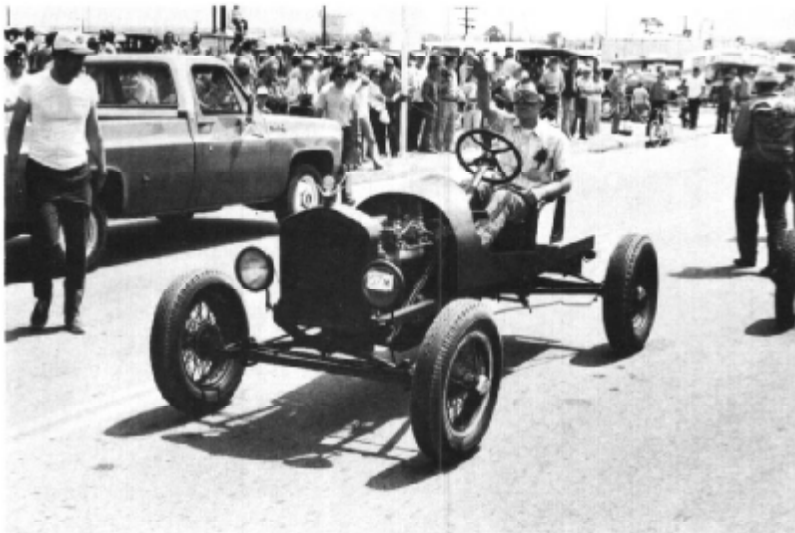


Jerry Sherman's flathead T crests the hill at 8.480. The engine has a Model A crankshaft; the car, an antique racer.

Shell Hill is no easy run for any Model T. Some were unable to make it to the top. An entry requirement is that the car must come back down facing forward (rather than just backing down). Just turning around on that grade is a thrill in itself!



Grover Seguire's Model T truck is a highlight of every Hill Climb. Each year he has a new "load." This year he carried a Kodak up for a top of 39.708. He might have done better if he had used faster film!



car. While there is little doubt that slow bumps will cause little or no damage, bumps of over five miles an hour are not helped; indeed, the cost of repairing or replacing the massive bumper system no doubt adds greatly to the repair costs.

But we seem to live in an era when the government can and does decide what it thinks we want, what we need, how much and how often.

You can be sure it is not the automotive industry that has decided we need heavier and more costly cars. I spoke to an official at one of the major manufacturers and he told me that the addition of the bumpers alone had added some seventy-five pounds to the weight of their compact and that with the additional "safety requirements the gas mileage of the car had dropped from over twenty-five miles per gallon to less than twenty! Of course, some of the anti-smog modifications have had their effect on economy but in this case we were comparing 1971 cars with 1974 cars and both had "smog engines.

With new cars this is the way it is. Little by little, if we are lucky, some sanity may return to the law-makers and "safety features may be considered in terms of their overall value. Does the protection of a few justify the added expense to the vast majority?

If you need a new car, you have to live with it. More than a few have decided to keep the old one — it gets better mileage, runs better, looks better and certainly costs less.

While many will complain that new cars should last longer, etc., it is the new car market that keeps this economy of ours going. When the automotive market slows, the whole country slows. In our attempts to cure the diseases, we just may kill the patient.

In the meantime, though, there is an answer to cars that are fun to drive. While this answer is no panacea, it does a good job for a good number of enthusiasts. The answer is the Model T Ford Speedster. These don't have five-mile-an-hour bumpers — may have none at all. Weight is not a problem — 2000 pounds would be excessive! Cost? The most elaborate Ford speedster won't cost as much as a new modern car.

Of course, the Speedster is not the answer to America's problems with the automobile. No one would long endure the uncomfortable ride, the lack of protection from the elements, etc., but for the sheer fun of driving, they just can't be beat!

For a number of years we have covered two California speedster events; the Long Beach Model T Club's *Shell Hill Climb* and the Santa Clara Valley Model T Club's *Endurance Run and Lowland Tour*. These two events have no doubt done more to bring back the speedster than have any other, mainly due to the publicity given them over the years. The Hill Climb celebrated its nineteenth year in May. It is surely the granddaddy of them all, at least in modern times.

The Hill Climb began originally as an event for stock Model T Fords but over the years it has become a Mecca for hot Ford enthusiasts. Indeed, there are more than a few cars which are built just for the *one-day event!* While the stock models still run, the speedsters and racers are the real attraction.

Since the Climb is run on public streets (which are blocked off during the event) all entries are supposed to be street legal and licensed. The Club makes every effort to make sure they operate within the law but occasional slip-ups occur, causing revision of the entry requirements and resulting misunderstandings among the participants. An example, this year, was in the delay of some entries because of a lack of headlights. An on-the-spot ruling by the Highway Patrol clarified the law; headlights were required only to run at



night — participation in this event was no problem.

Through the years the times have been steadily reduced. This year almost a quarter of a second was dropped; the new record for the tenth-mile run was 7.586 seconds. For comparison, the best time for a stock Model T was 18.615.

Cars entered in the hill climb are grouped into classes, thirteen this year, so that cars with similar equipment compete with each other. Classifications run from completely stock (in several body-style groups) to unlimited, anything goes (that s street legal) race cars.

Hill climbs, though, are events mainly for the participants, and the number of participants is somewhat limited by the number of hours in the day. To be sure, there are plenty of spectators. There was even coverage by national television. But after you have seen a few Model T Fords chug up the hill, it s ho-hum time.

One answer to the participation limits of a hill climb has been the Endurance Run, one of the first being that conducted by the Santa Clara Valley Model T Club, a chapter of the MTFCA. Here, although the actual run is limited to about sixty cars, all of which must be of the speedster type, and with Model T engines and run-



ning gear, many more people can drive their cars in a companion event called the *Lowland Tour*. The Lowland Tour participants gather at the starting line (in the center of San Jose, California) to cheer the racers off. While the racers cover their approximately 200-mile course, the Lowland Tour takes an easier route and meets the race participants at the half-way point. Here entertainment, food and refreshments are provided for participants of both groups. The lunch stop has been provided by Livermore s Ford dealer, Codoroli Ford, one of the sponsors of the event.

As the racers take off after lunch, the Lowland Tour again takes the slow route to the finish line for the award ceremonies. It s a full day for everyone.

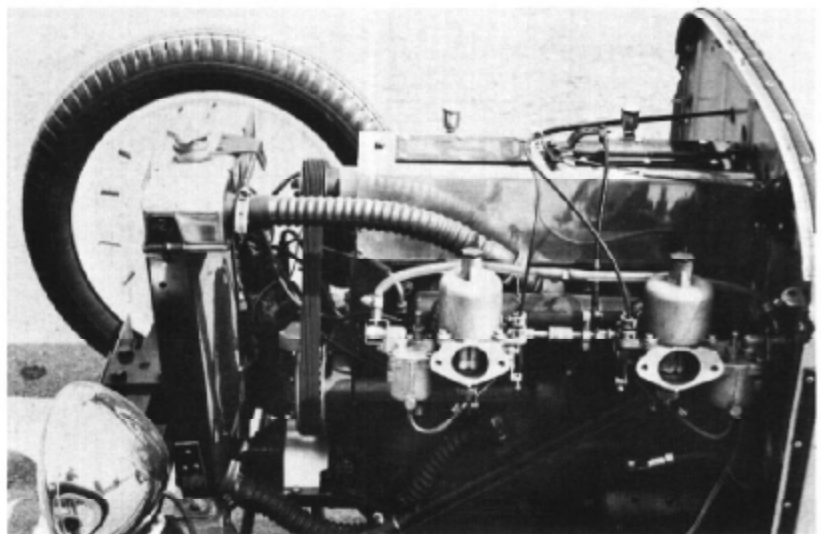
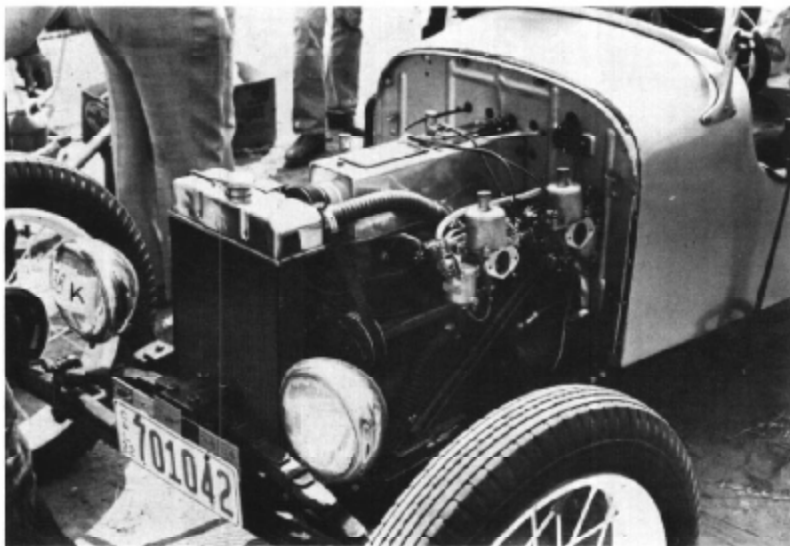
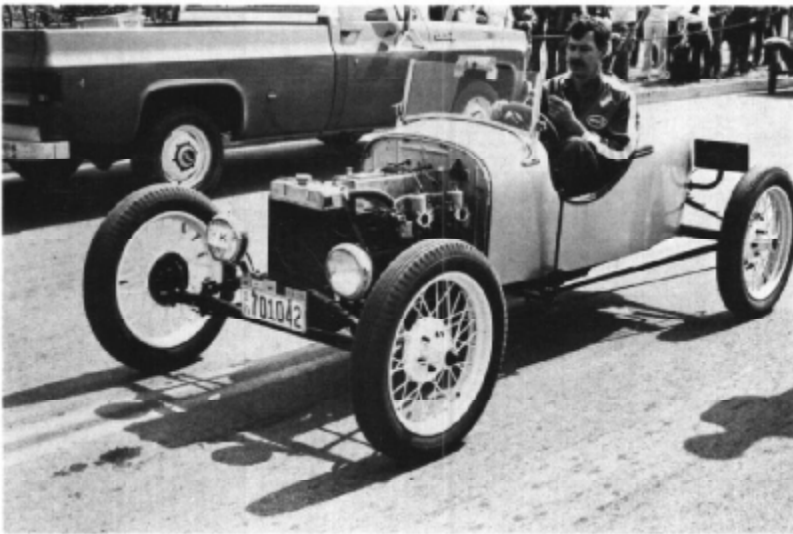
Top to bottom: The Endurance Run beginning at the marshaling are in Santa Clara; enroute to the starting line in San Jose; and at the starting line.

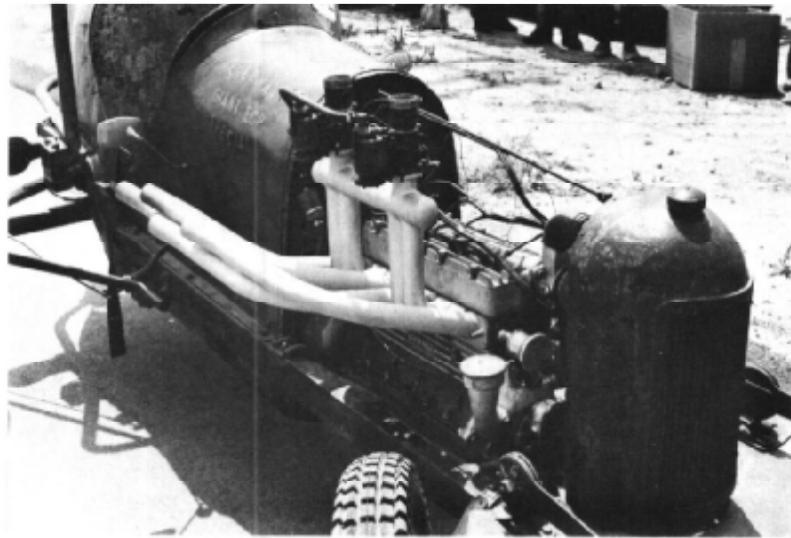
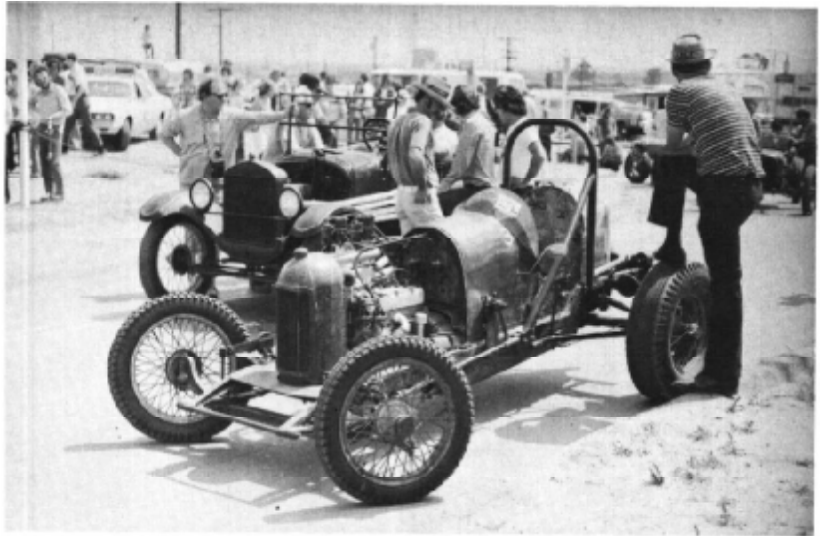
The Endurance Run is not a race. Prior to the official run a stock speedster makes the course at average and legal speeds and the time is recorded as the standard. The winner of the official run is that participant who comes closest to the standard time. There are check points along the route to make sure every participant in the run takes the right roads (no short cuts) and to check the times. The route is a real challenge; many low gear hills, sharp turns and straight stretches are included.

Photographic coverage of either of these events is somewhat difficult. Participants are either busy with their cars or driving. Pictures must be taken during stops, before or after the event (when swarms of people make proper pictures impossible to get). Try as we will, it is inevitable that we miss a few cars. The pictures that follow are of some of the cars in the events, not all of them. If you were one of the entries and your picture is not included, blame someone — someone about 1000 miles away if you can. We did our best.

A suggestion for all events at which photos of all participants would be desired would be to schedule a parade of the cars, one at a time, past the photographer. We'll work on this the next time.







THE DREAD ILLNESS

By Anne Moulton

Up at the crack of dawn (or before) - that's how all previous speedster runs have begun and this year was no different. Why do supposedly sane people subject themselves to such torture? The only explanation is that illness known as speedster madness which strikes each year early in June.

The symptoms are many: incessant worry about mechanical details such as valves and rods; sleepless nights spent on tasks such as rebuilding whole engines or installing exotic transmissions; greasy hands and banged-up knuckles; neglect of such normal responsibilities as job and family; purchase and wearing of strange clothing such as racing goggles and new white overalls, sometimes inscribed with numbers and superstitious symbols.

The symptoms begin early in the year, sometimes even in February or March. By May of 1975 upwards of sixty-five people and many of their friends and relatives were stricken with serious cases of the dread disease. Two patients from Connecticut and two from Nebraska were victims this year.

The disease's toll was heavy this year on June first. Sixty-five victims awoke at ranging and insane hours such as 4 a.m. and 5 a.m. Some didn't even have to get out of bed - never having gone there in the first place.

Then they assembled in a deserted stadium in Santa Clara. There, they were photographed and received medication in the form of maps and transmission fluid. And then they drove their vehicles to San Jose where they heard the magic words that set their hearts pounding and their pulses racing: "Gentlemen, start your engines!"

These words produce more strange symptoms and self-torture. The victims then drive their uncomfortable vehicles on a tortuous, dusty, hot and winding course to Livermore, stopping only for such dire necessities as gas, water and oil. At Livermore they stop briefly to consume hot dogs and ponder maps.

Then off again, this time following the dreaded Mines Road to San Antonio Junction. Here the road climbs up and over treacherous Mount Hamilton. The drivers subject themselves to the most tortuous part of their day there, some not even pausing as they cross the summit, others chanting "on to the finish line!"

So finally our victims reach their magic destination: the finish line. Here a gentleman waves a flag at them. Also they encounter many people wearing old clothing and they listen to music played by a banjo band. Then they start to gather where two people called "chairmen" begin to talk and give away objects of wood and metal called trophies.

After all the trophies but one are given out, the crowd quiets, then cheers when the winner of the day of speedster madness is proclaimed. Harold Cunningham [this year's winner] subjects himself to even more torture by having a full bottle of champagne poured on his head.

Then the victims slowly return to reality, focusing on the real and necessities such as food and showers and work on Monday. Once stricken, however, they never fully recover. There is more talk of the speedster and lots of speculation about next year. The victims feel ordinary people don't understand their illness. But when asked "Why, most can only shake their heads and reply, "Why, indeed?"

From the Santa Clara Valley Chapter's publication,
BACKFIRE



FROM CONNECTICUT

Car 51 on the Endurance Run came all the way from Connecticut! The car is basically stock, using a 1926 engine. The car was driven by Justin Horowitz and his dad, Dr. Joe Horowitz acted as the mechanic.

Here is their story as told by the doctor -

"Today Justin and I have come full circle. The white mechanic suits are in the washer, the speedster is waiting for new transmission bands and our trailer sits on the front lawn with her broken axle stuck in the ground. But that's another story.

"I've just laid out the maps of the 1975 Endurance Run and am reliving last Sunday for the umpteenth time. A worn copy of *Sports and Travel* for May 1973 is on my desk. You don't usually buy this magazine. It's an office freebie for physicians. The picture of "majestic Ed Archer complete with puttees, helmet and goggles started my wheels turning. Coincidentally, we had just completed our first restoration - a lovely Model A Vicky.

"The magazine came home that night and wife Margaret and son Justin were told that we had to build a speedster and run it in California against the "best in the West" in 1974. Marge has seen that look in my eyes before. She turned to Justin and the wordless message from mother to son of "Here we go again" was clear.

"My intimate knowledge of the "T" was limited to a single ride at age ten in a 1924 Coupe, and casual observation of T's at various auto shows. Something must have been stirring for several years because I had come into possession of a badly rusted-out original Torpedo seatback, dash trim and steering column. A chassis was hauled out of the mud from a local pig farm only after we had spent the better part of an afternoon rounding up a herd(?) of escaped piglets. This stuff sat during the two years we rebuilt the Victoria.

"We have a friend, currently a state legislator, who is encyclopedic on Fords. He provided source material and pictures and helped in acquiring parts - like beating me to a mint brass radiator at a flea market.

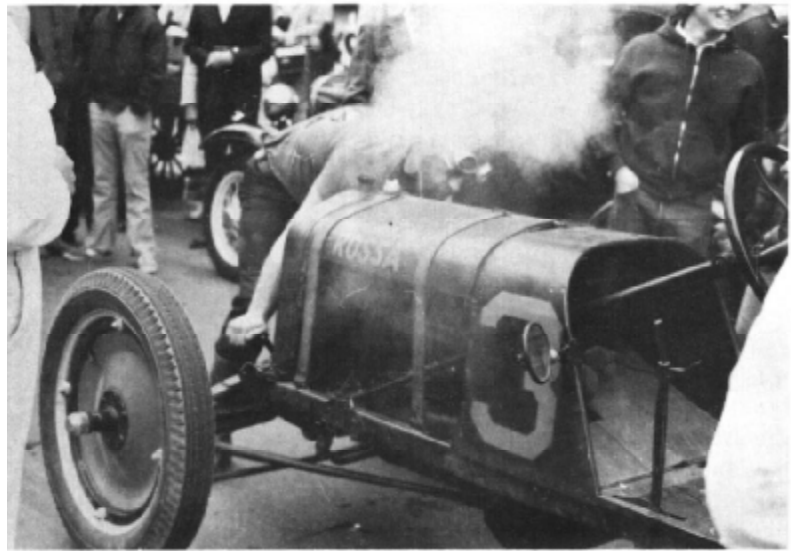


"My particular interest is in wood design and since I'd taken a course in wood laminating the seat had to be a wood bench. Building the 300 pound mold proved more difficult than anticipated but the mahogany seat was worth the effort. Justin, age 15 at the start of the project, is an intuitive mechanic who is not beyond "looking it up" when he gets stuck.

"Parts were acquired all over New England and the Middle Atlantic states. Our best friends at the flea markets are a small magnet and sharp finger nail. There's a lot of brass under old paint and thin plating, thus our drum head and cowl lights for a song.

"Justin made the fenders and irons at the high school metal shop. The seat went out for professional upholstery. We obtained a sound original brass radiator from one of nature's noblemen. This kind gentleman felt that the right home for the radiator was more important than getting a high price.

"We were accepted for the '74 Run but had to cancel at the last minute because of a switch in my office schedule. Disappointing yes but now we were set for 1975. That summer Justin entered the car in a local show and was awarded second place in the speedster division. On the way home some of the magnets came loose and shattered the transmission casing. The winter and spring were spent in rebuilding the transmission and motor. In retrospect it's apparent that we wouldn't have completed the Run without reworking the mechanicals. Some of the sting was relieved by locating such goodies as a brass monocle with Ford script and solid brass script hub caps for late wire wheels.



These are of recent manufacture but are of first-class workmanship.

"The effort, discouragement and ultimate completion of the project ran parallel to our experience on the Run. The little brass radiator and running "stock" resulted in a late arrival at Livermore. Even the hot dogs were gone and we began thinking of "to hell with the run. Let's get back before dark. Lunch at Cactus Jack's must have been more stimulating than I thought and our moods improved. Picking up the old blood sugar certainly made a difference.

"The car ran smoothly and Justin was getting adept in the turns without losing speed. By the time we made the top of Mt. Hamilton we knew we'd complete the run.

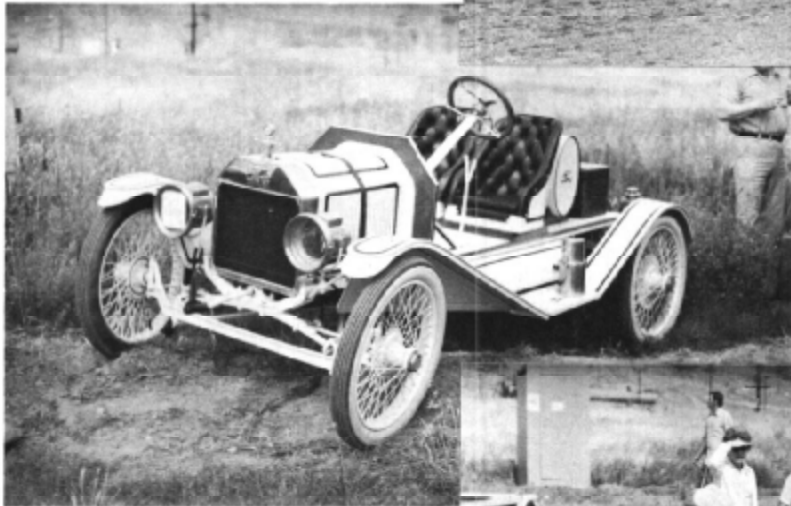
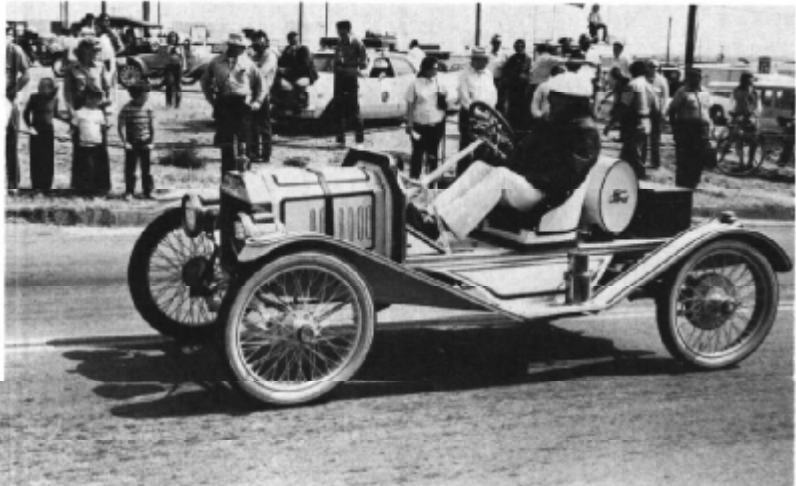
"A slightly worried Larry Streeter, still

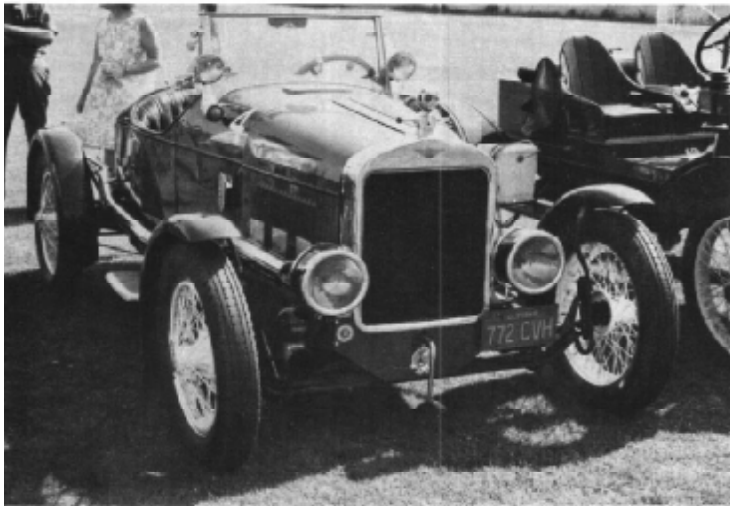
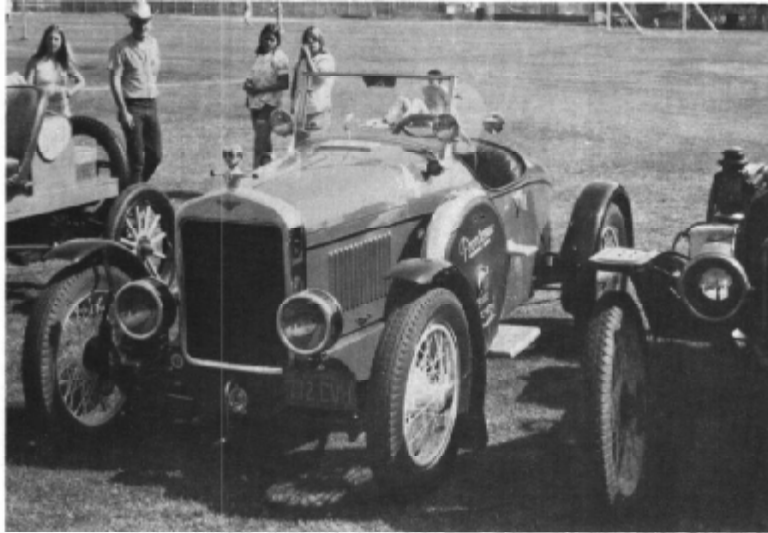
in his jazz-age get-up “just happened to meet us at the edge of San Jose and lead us to the finish line. His checkered flag went down with a time of 11:58:28.

“We didn’t care about the time. We hugged. We grinned. We laughed. We took pictures. We have a million memories.

“We spent the trip home planning a boat-tail speedster in mahogany. This one will have a Ruckstell, Rocky Mountain brakes and a BIG WINFIELD. If the runs continue and the world holds together we plan to challenge you again in 1977.

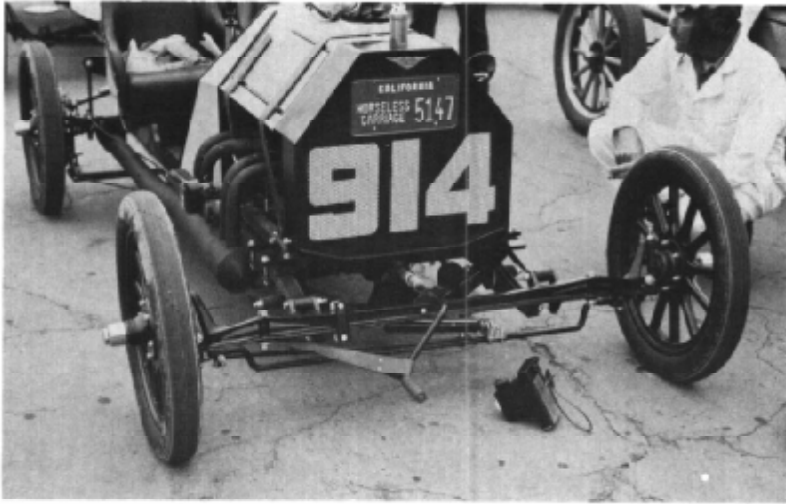
Joe Horowitz



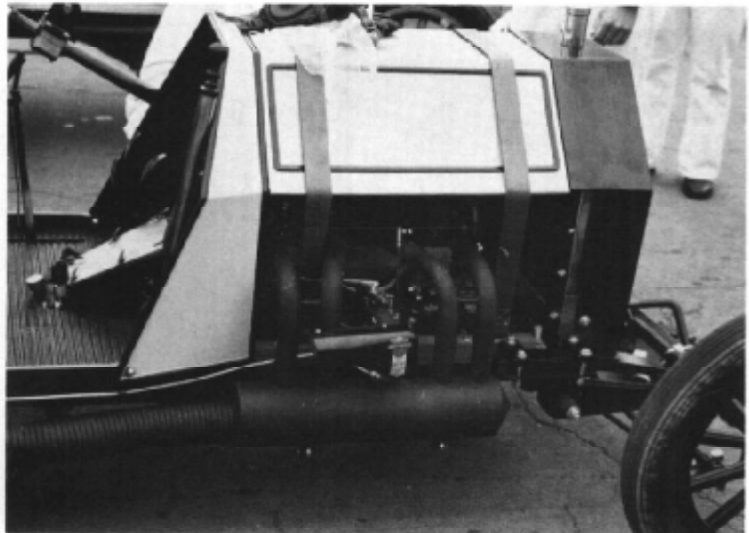
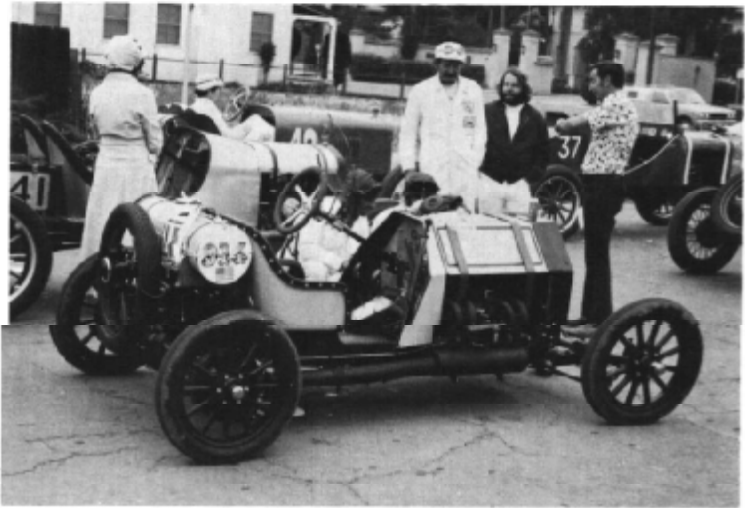


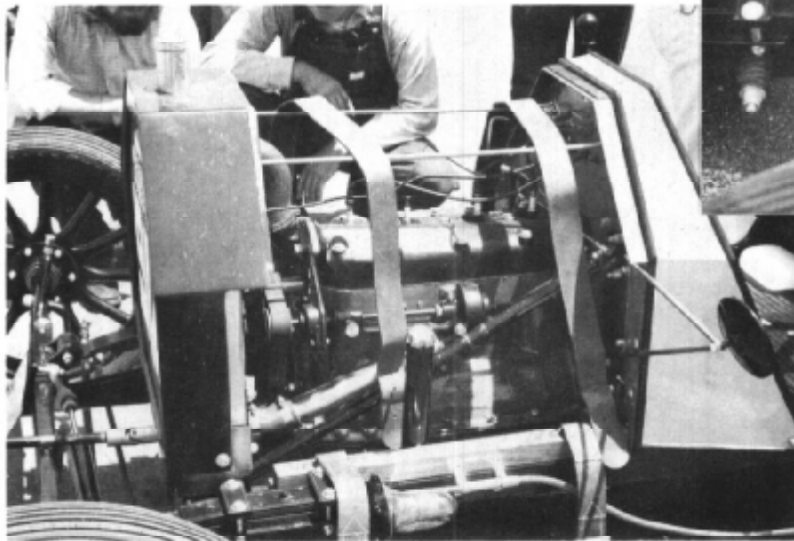
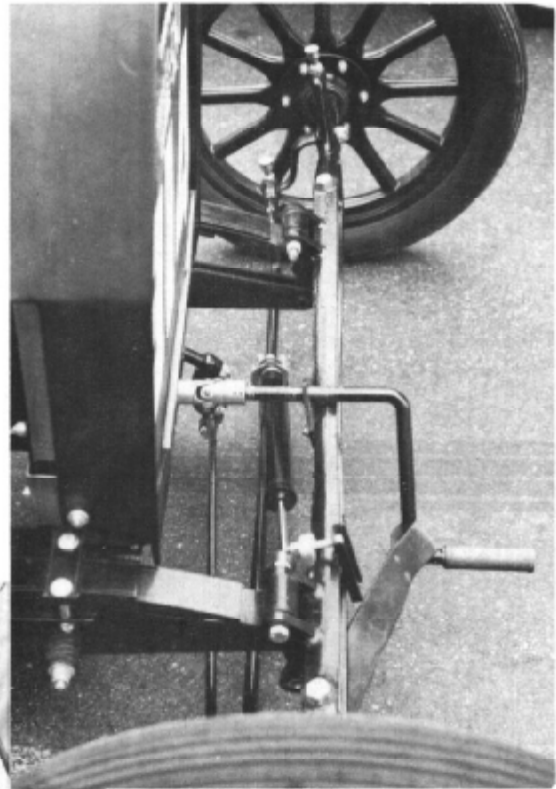
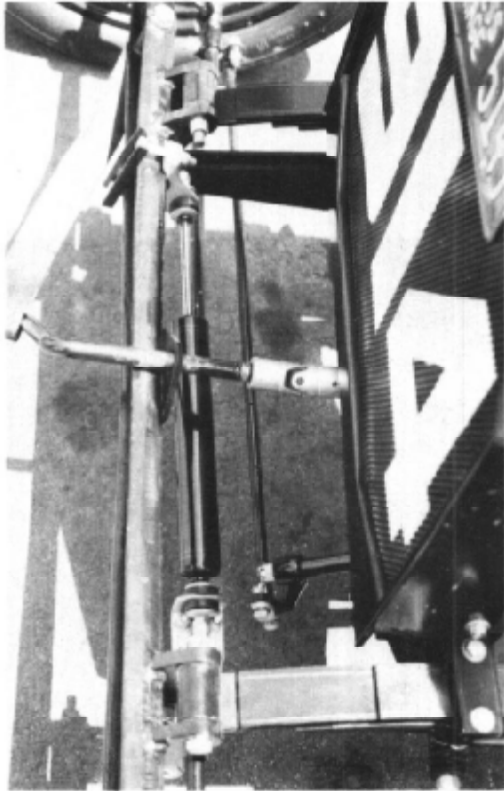
Vic Sala's Mercury speedster — certainly one of the prettiest cars on the Run.



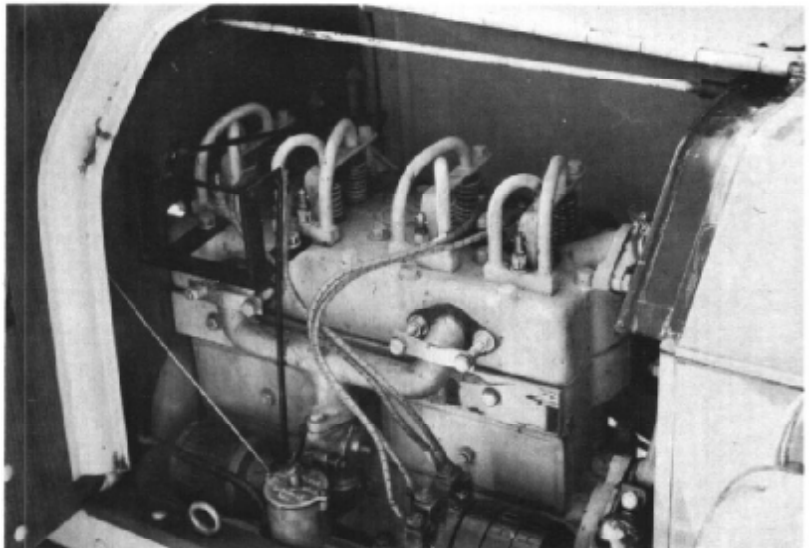
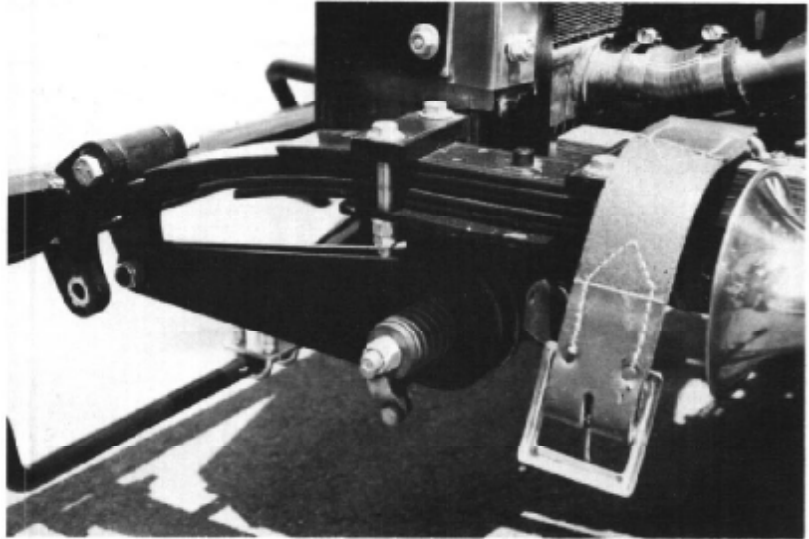
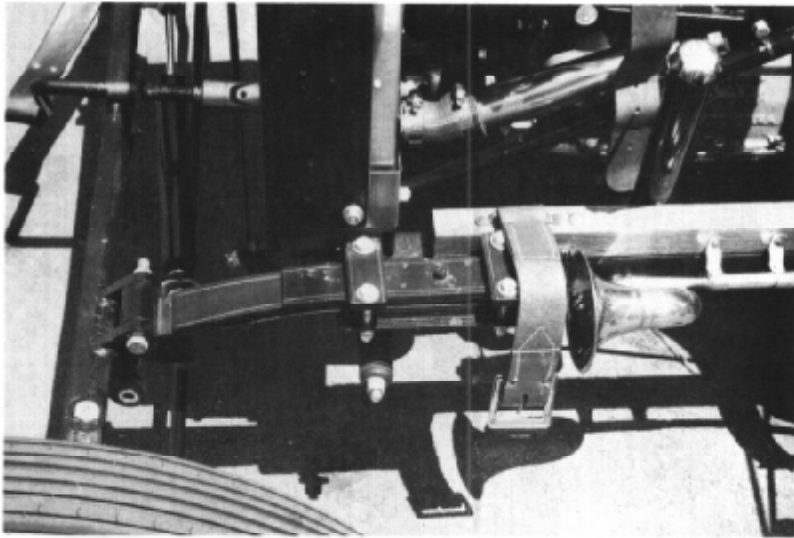


This interesting and innovative car is owned by David Willis. Unfortunately Dave did not fill out and return our questionnaire and, therefore, we do not have any information on the car. Among the many interesting details is the "quick change transmission cover door which made the oft-needed job of adjusting the bands that much easier. Note the brass tire pump used to (we presume) pressure the fuel tank.



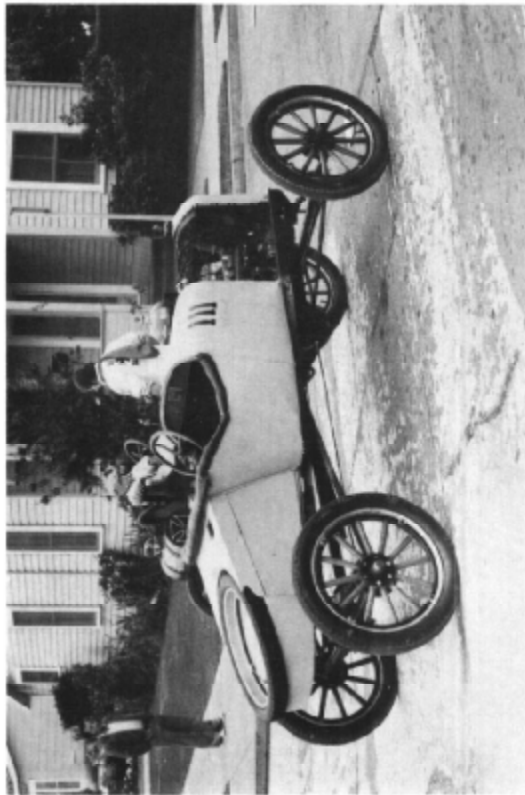


The front suspension is quite unusual and resembles that used on the early Chevrolets. Note the hydraulic shock absorber on the steering linkage, and the friction shocks below the springs. The arms of the friction shocks also serve to support the axle, in the manner of the usual Ford wishbone. The rear axle uses the regular Ford spring but is also fitted with friction shocks.

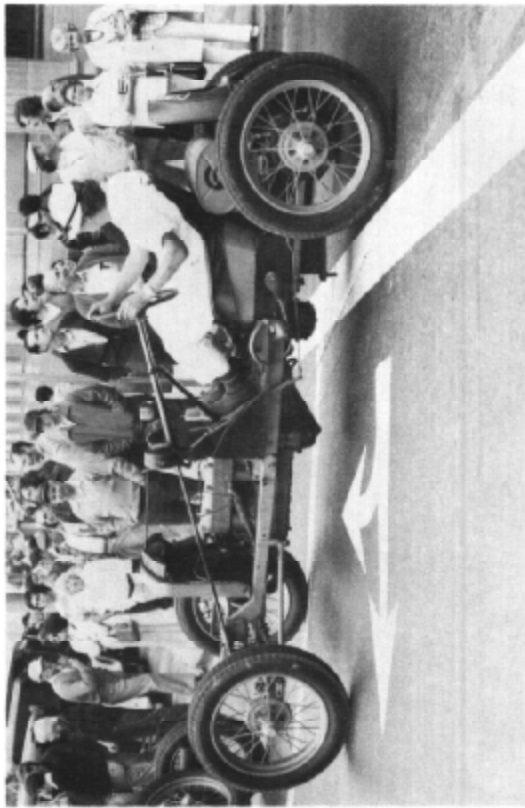


THEY REALLY DID RUN!

Somehow we missed photographing the car but we did get pictures of the Akron head used on Lloyd Riggs entry in the Endurance Run. In this unusual head, the valves are operated by a number of ball bearings inside the tubes you see. The car also runs a Model A crank, an Eisenman magneto and a Winfield carburetor and manifold,



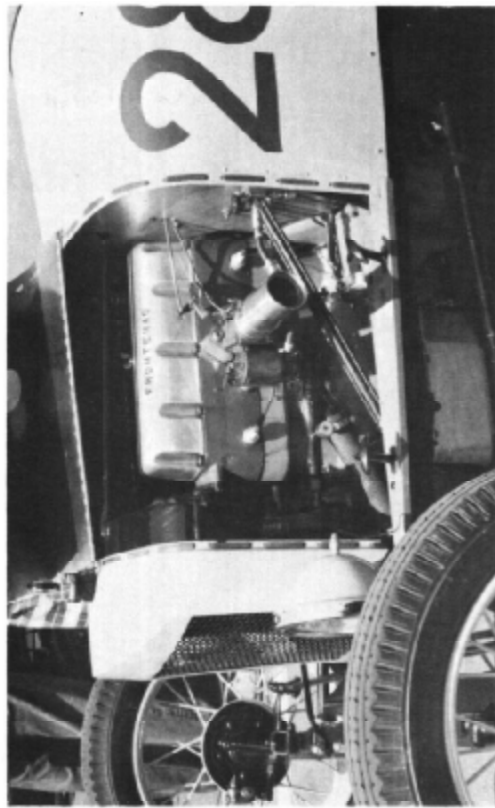
Jeff Wilson's 1922 speedster. The engine is stock but is coupled to a Chevrolet three speed transmission.



Harold Cunningham's 1920 speedster. Engine is essentially stock except for dual Holley NH carburetors and a milled head. The car runs a Warford transmission and a 4 to 1 rear axle.

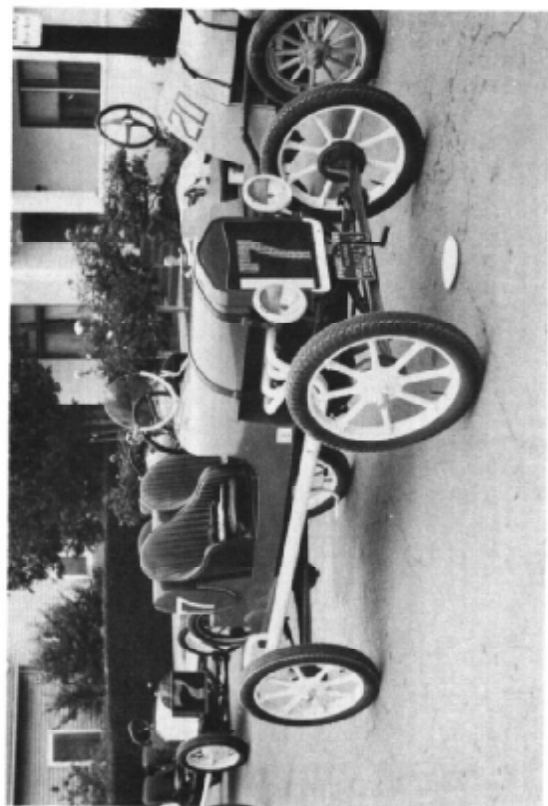


Bill McLintock's beautiful speedster runs a Frontenac overhead conversion, a "suicide" front end and '26-27 wire wheels.





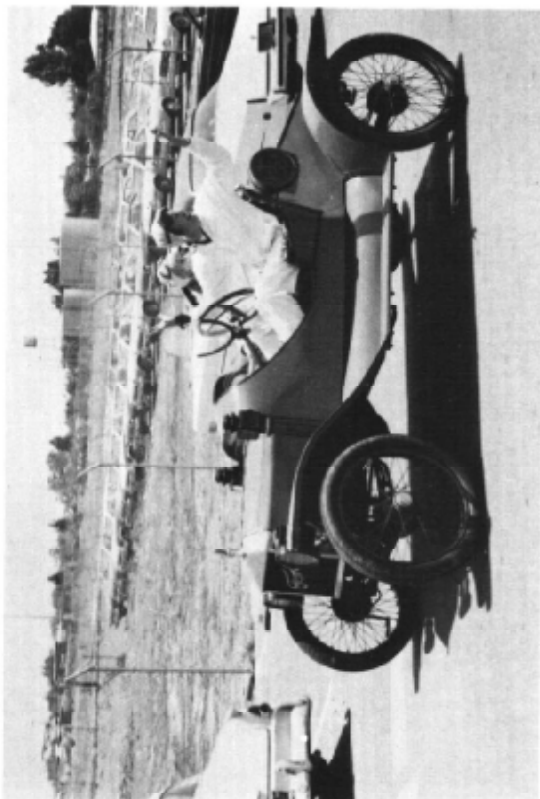
Doug Abernethy's 1917 speedster has an "A" crank, Bosch-type distributor, Carter up-draft carburetor and a Turbot cylinder head.



Howard Genrich runs a T crank and T ignition but uses headers and a Winfield carburetor.



Dave Denison's speedster runs a stock engine except for aluminum pistons and a Stromberg carburetor. The boat tail is made of wood.



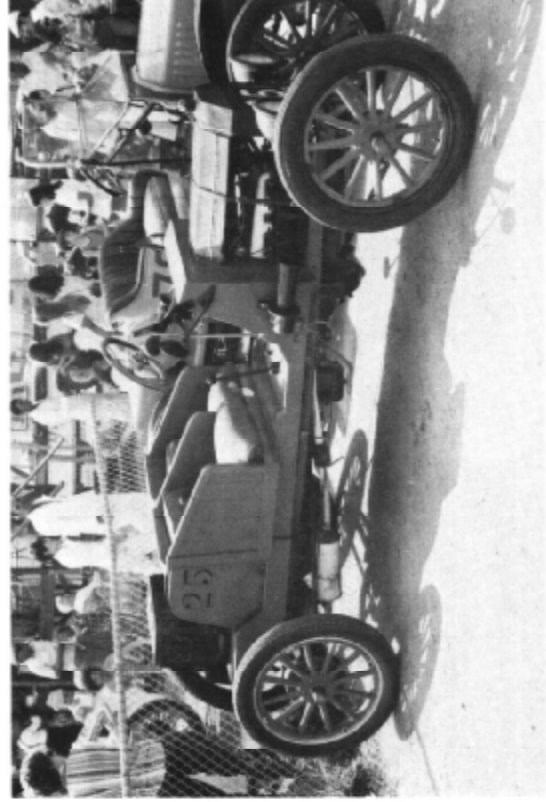
Doug Anderson's car runs a Warford, Winfield carburetor, and features a Livingston "V" radiator.



The loving hands of home! Owned and driven by Jim Straight, with his father-in-law, Al Roysum riding as mechanic, this car ran the Run with the following "racing" equipment: 1926 transmission and differential; original iron pistons with one-dollar (at a swap meet) rings; a New Day timer and old Ford script coils. For that 'extra something' the head was shaved .060". For the proper control of all that power, Jim also has installed a Warford transmission, plus modern lining on the rear brakes to save him when she goes into neutral.

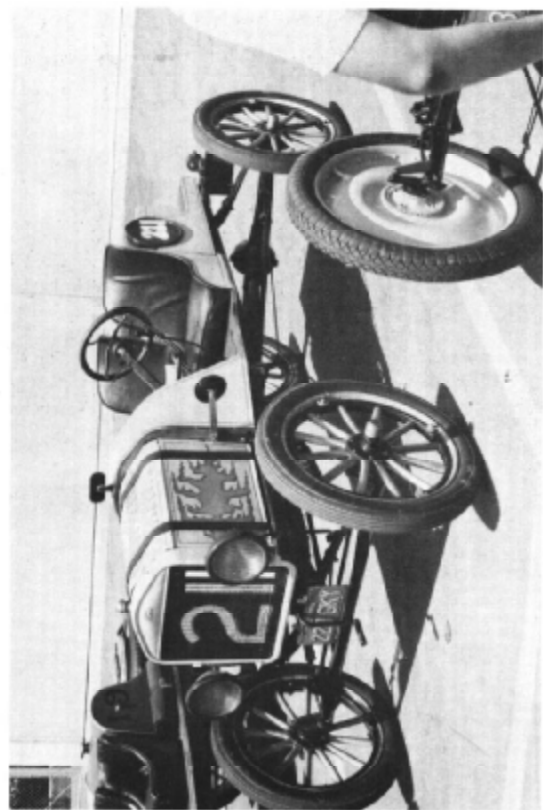
Jim ran 70% anti-freeze (in the radiator, we presume) and only bailed once on the Endurance Run (and probably once again when he reads this!). He says he is going to use balloon tires next year for better traction. He also mentioned he was not too happy with the T ignition and carburetion and will try something else next year.

Maybe a whole new unit, Jim?

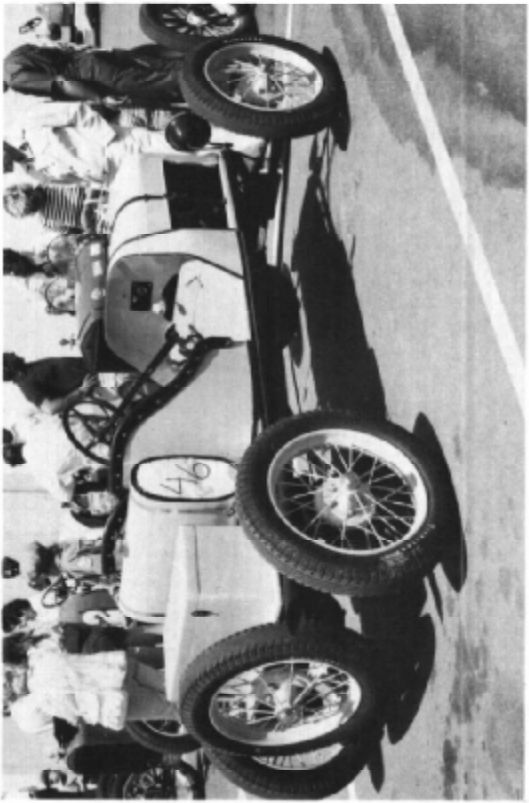




George Azevedo's Faultless-bodied car runs a flat head with a drilled T crank and many bolt-on modifications.



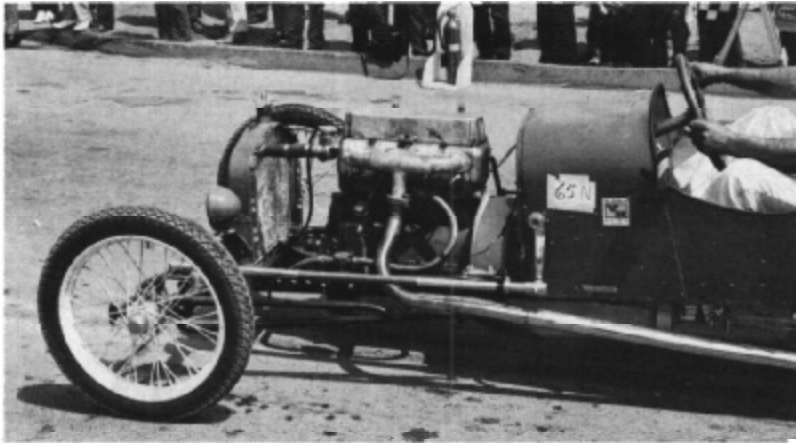
This stock speedster is owned by the Cupertino High School and was driven by Sid and Rich James.



Don Wedin's speedster has a counterbalanced T crank, a Habie high-compression head and other engine modifications.



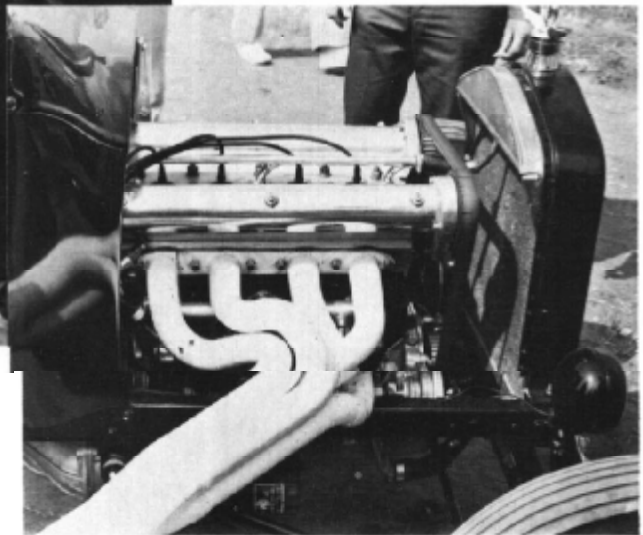
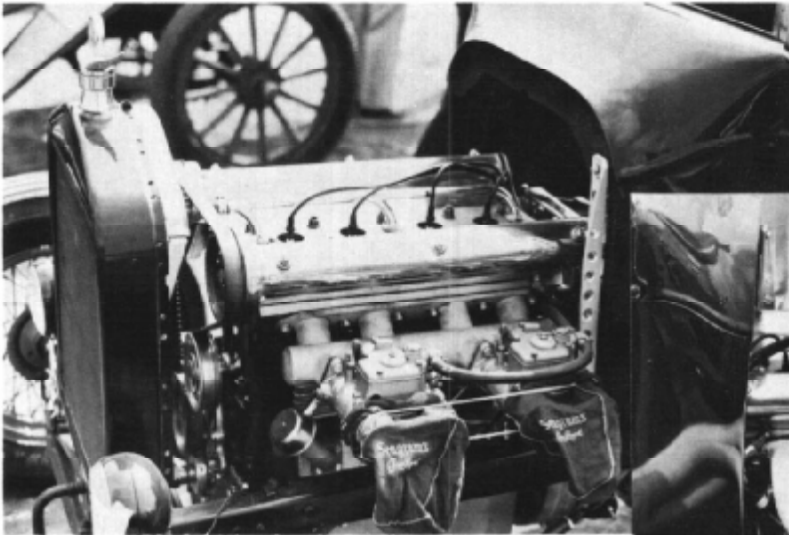
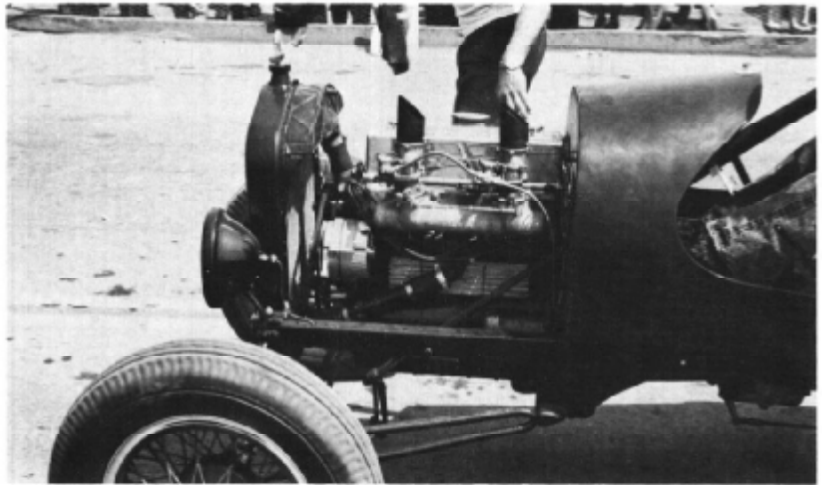
Vic Schmidt's speedster has a mostly stock T engine with a single down-draft carburetor and Bosch ignition.



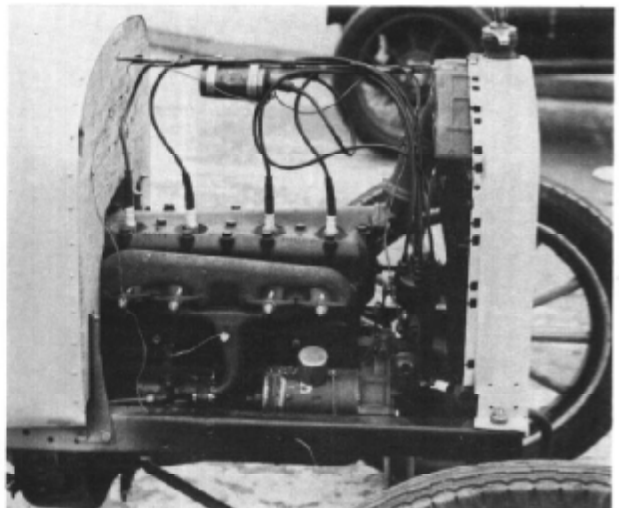
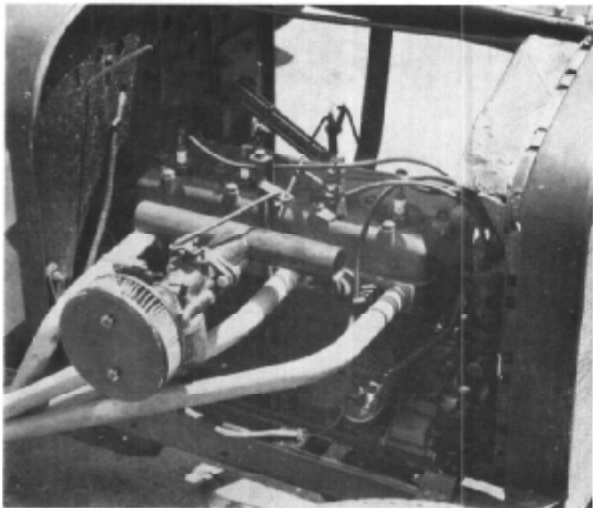
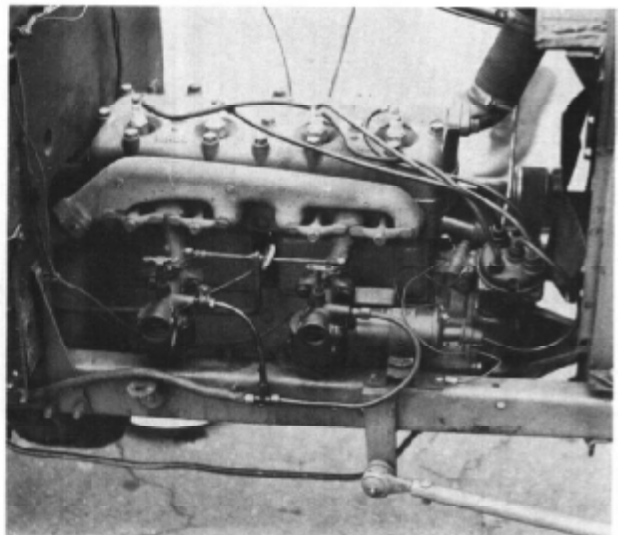
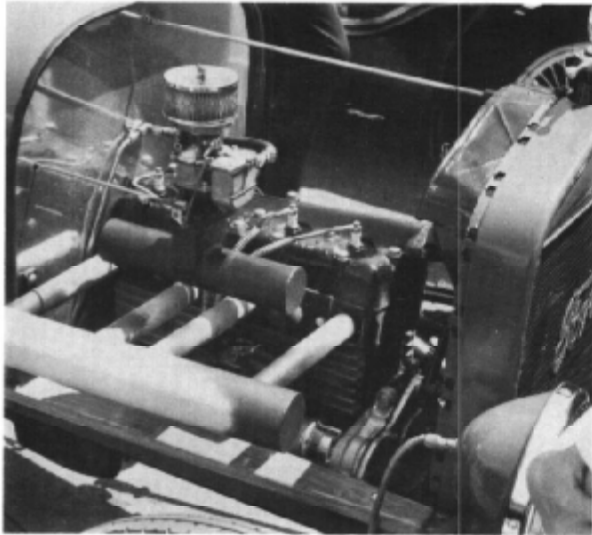
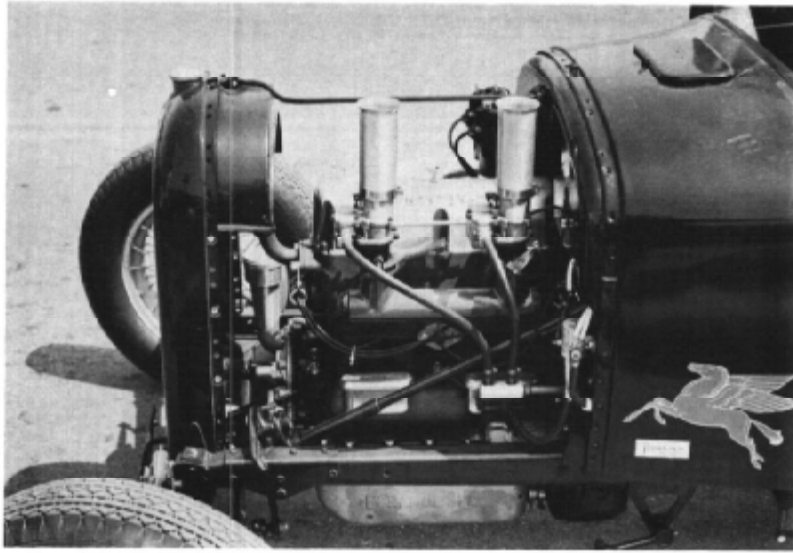
ENGINES

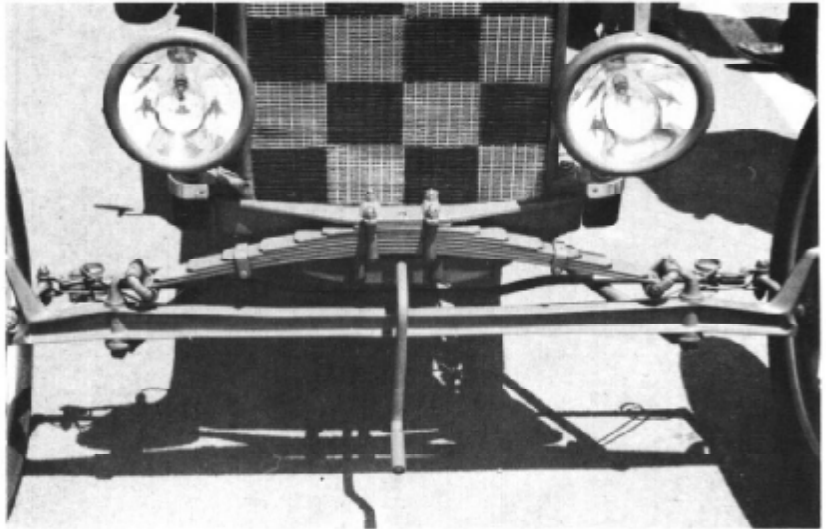
The following pages show some of the engines in the cars at both the Hill Climb and the Endurance Run.

Look and dream!!!!



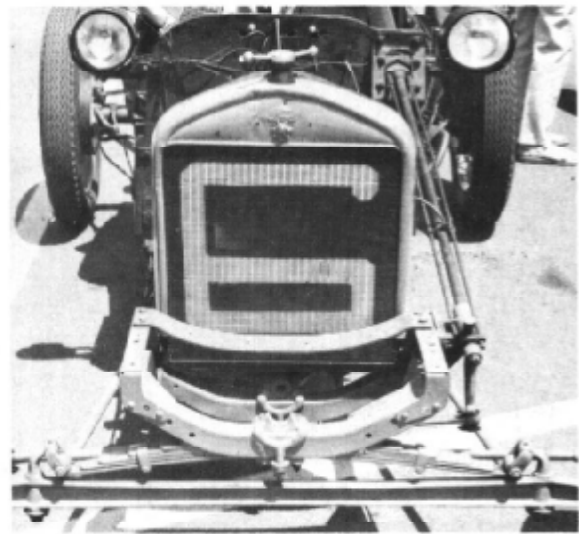
New this year at the Shelf Hill Climb was this dual overhead cam speedster owned by Larue Thomas. The overhead conversion was designed and built by Joe Gemsa who does this sort of thing as a hobby. The two camshafts are driven by a gilmer belt. The car took fourth place with a time of 7.906 seconds.

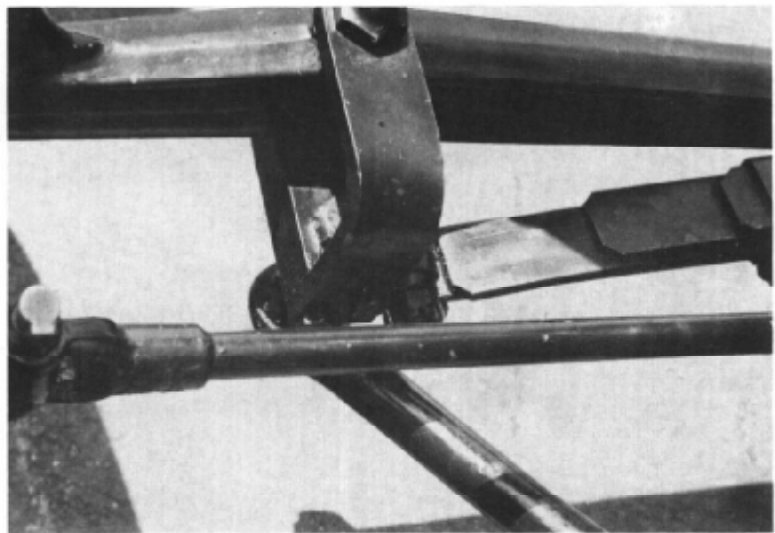
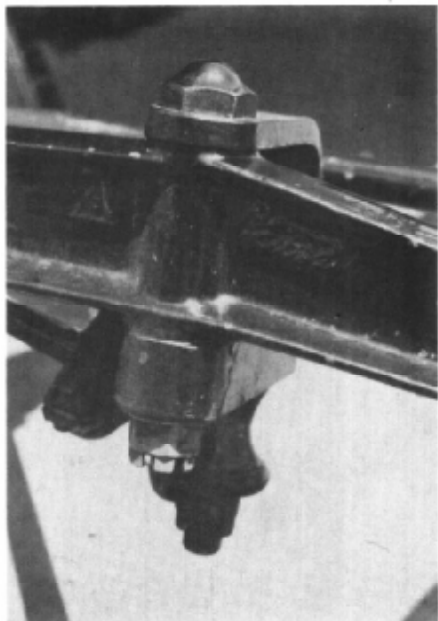
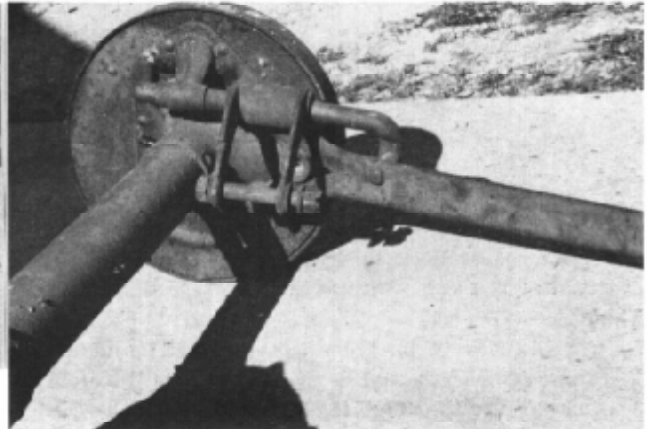
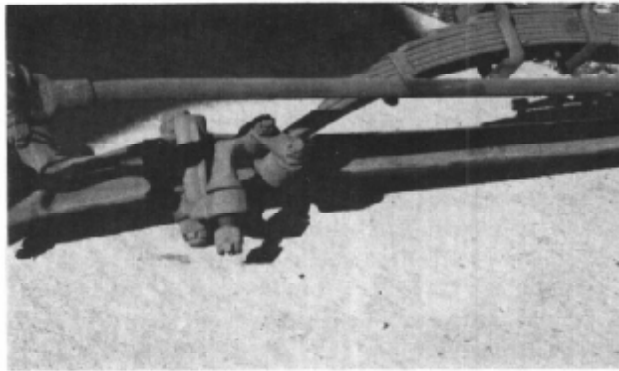


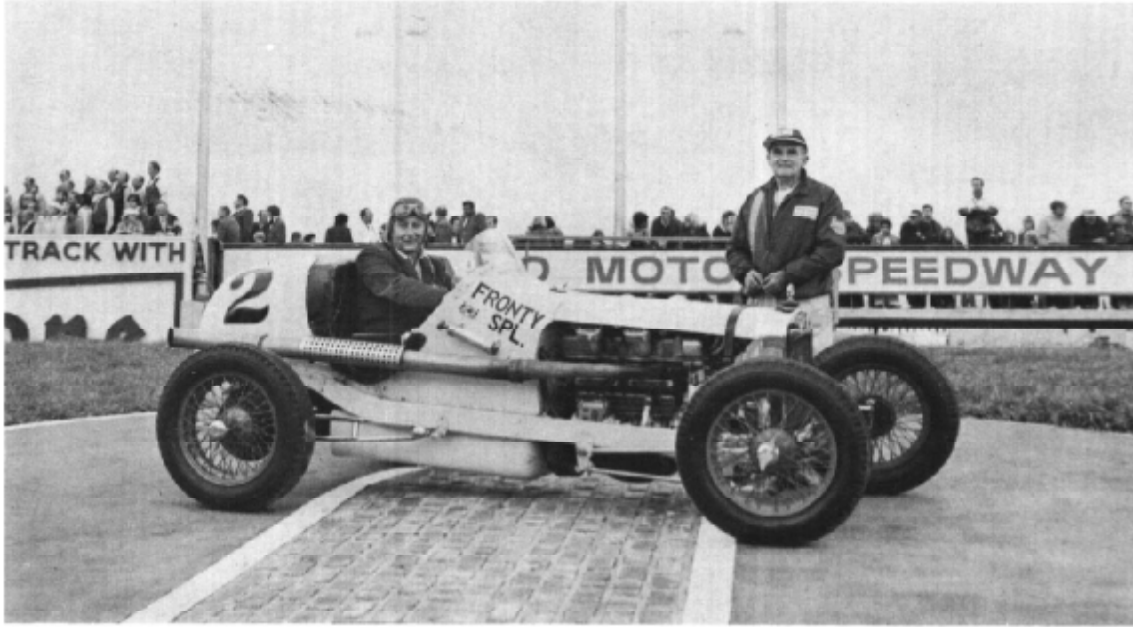


LOWERING THE CHASSIS

Since the Model T was built with a road clearance of about ten and a half inches, one of the first things done is to lower the chassis. Shown here are a few of the many methods used to lower the front end. Similar methods are used at the rear but due to their location they are nearly impossible to photograph once the body is in place.







Gil Erickson, the Fronty Ford, and their mechanic, Don Sagar. Ontario Motor Speedway photo.

LOCAL BOY MAKES GOOD

March 9, 1975. Ontario Motor Speedway, Ontario, California. Gil Erickson, driving his restored 1924 Fronty-Ford race car takes first place in an exhibition race of antique race cars. The car reached a speed of 91.217 mph!

“This was to be a one lap event but the cars got around so well they let us go two laps. The DO Fronty came to life and took the lead, and held it. We were given a third lap, up to the Winner’s Circle, where the car was displayed before a crowd of over sixty-thousand people.

“Here I met a number of racing celebrities, including

Jimmie Doolittle, Earl Cooper, Pete DePaolo, Pamelli Jones and Tony Hullman, operator of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. What a wonderful occasion!

And from the look on Gil’s face, you can believe this was one of the most thrilling days of his sixty-two year long lifetime!

Gil purchased the car a few years ago from R. L. “Doc” Pruden. Doc had run it for a number of years in the Long Beach Model T Club’s Shell Hill Climb, holding the record for some time. In turn, Gil has re-restored it, replacing the radiator and generally bringing it back to the appearance it had when it was first used.





What a wonderful occasion. Left to right: Jimmie Doolittle, Earl Cooper, Pete DePaolo, Gil Erickson and Don Sagar. Ontario Motor Speedway photo.