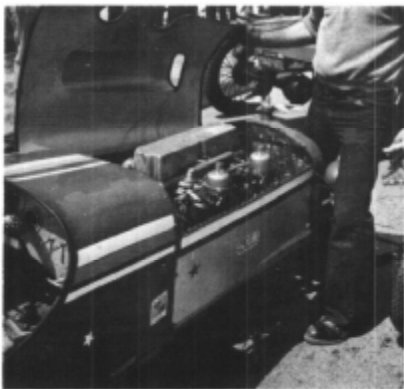




# Hot "T," Anyone?

*Story and Photos by Bruce McCalley*



As most everyone knows, the Model T Ford was the original 'hot rod. More special equipment was made for this one car than for all others combined! There is hardly a man living today who is old enough to have been a driver during the heyday of the Model T that does not have a story about some Ford speedster in his youth.

It has been forty-nine years since the last Model T came off the assembly line. The cars that have followed have been superior in almost every respect except in simplicity and one would presume that the old Model T would have been forgotten with the advent of "modern cars. Indeed, the Ford V-8 "stole the show" during the thirties and forties and the "T" was all but forgotten.

Perhaps it was due to the depression, perhaps just

because there were so many to begin with, but the T did survive, and a few even made their marks in those hard times. Whatever the reason, there seems to be more Model T speedsters today than there are V-8 Hot Rods!

Perhaps one of the best reasons for the upsurge of interest in Model T speedsters is the apparent surplus of engines and chassis components when compared with the available bodies. Not only does a speedster make a very interesting and exciting car, it does not require a standard Ford body. Furthermore, the owner-builder can have a free hand in the design of his car, spending as much or as little as he sees fit.

In addition, the Model T speedster, even in "stock running condition, makes an exciting automobile. Since it generally is quite light - not over 1500 pounds - even the standard T engine can make it "move and this very lightness also makes it a good handler on the curves.

The spirit of competition has always been a part of the very nature of man. The increase in the number of speedsters in recent years has naturally generated an enthusiasm for events which will allow the owners to "show their stuff. Competitive events have been staged which allow friendly "battles between participants with a minimum of danger to the drivers and their cars. More than one enthusiast now spends all year working on his



*BELOW - Shell Hill is a 22% grade and is 1/10th of a mile long. A stock Model T touring car can make it in somewhere around twenty to thirty seconds, using low pedal for the major distance.*



car in preparation for just one event; the car is never seen anywhere else.

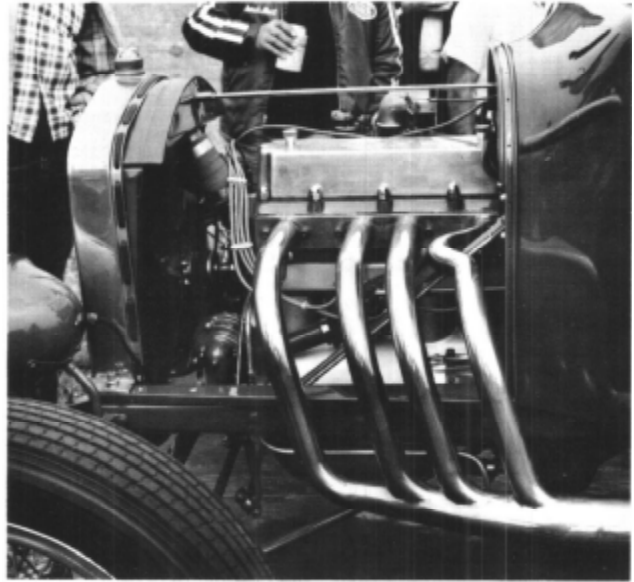
One of the major events in Model T sports is the annual hill climb sponsored by the Long Beach Model T Ford Club, Long Beach, California. This year marked the twentieth anniversary of the event. What began as a Sunday outing to see if a T could make it up the hill has developed into one of the major attractions for the speedster enthusiast. Publicity given this Climb (largely through *The Vintage Ford*) has resulted in many similar events across the country, but this, the Shell Hill Climb, remains the granddaddy and largest of them all.

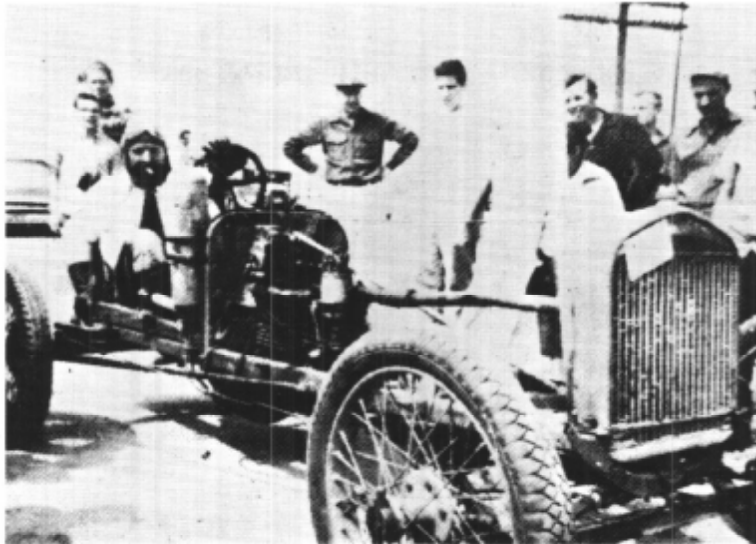
The Shell Hill Climb, of course, started out as an event for a standard Model T Ford, and except for an occasional speedster or stock car with a Rajo or Fronty head, there was little in the way of excitement. In 1960, though, a rival club, the Model T Ford Club of Southern California, entered a "race car." Using a built-up Model T engine with a Rajo head, and this mounted near the rear of the frame to give better traction, this car broke the ice. The head, block, chassis and other parts were all donated by the members who assembled the "Wild Cherry" and it looked like a running disaster. The radiator had been sitting out in a barnyard for years and the horses had used it for a scratching post; the fins were all worn away. The steering column was a length of water pipe with a wheel on one end and a splice on the other and supported only by a knot hole in the firewall. The driver sat on a simple seat strapped to the rear of the frame over the rear axle. Bad as it looked, and unsafe as it was, it made it over the hill in around eleven seconds, considerably faster than ever before. With this, a new era began at Shell Hill.

Well, records are meant to be broken, and it wasn't long before this one was. And it's never stopped. This year's fastest time was just 7.423 seconds!

A stock Model T is lucky to be going over twenty miles per hour at the top of Shell Hill but the hot cars are going over sixty-five! The hill crests rather abruptly and these racers almost leave the ground!

Since Shell Hill is a city-owned street, the cars must be street-legal - licensed and meeting all California motor vehicle codes. In the early days of the climb no





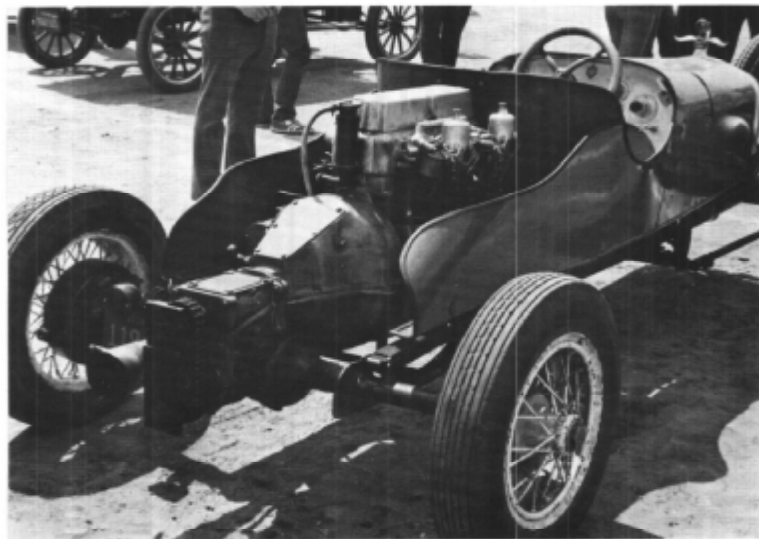
#### MILESTONE CARS

*The first 'real racer' was the "Wild Cherry" entered in 1960 by a group of members of the Model T Ford Club of Southern California. While it looked like "the loving hands of home" it set a new record of twelve seconds flat and began a new era for the Shell Hill Climb.*

*That's Billy Poobah at the wheel.*

*Later, Doc Pruden entered his D.O.C. Frontenac race car and set a new record of 8.22 seconds in 1969. Doc ran this car for several years, losing the crown in 1970 (due to a broken transmission) to Clem Sala who made it in 8.15. Doc regained the crown in 1970 when he made the hill in the same time as before, 8.22.*

*In 1972, Al Usalangi entered a rear-engined race car and set a new record of 7.75 seconds. This was the first and last year for rear-engined cars; they were outlawed for the Hill in 1973.*



*In 1973, Al Usalanghi came back with a new car using the same engine that set the record in 1972, but the engine failed during the trials, eliminating him from the competition.*

*However, a new car, owned and driven by Chris Egsgaard, set another record at 7.74 seconds - 1/100 of a second better!*

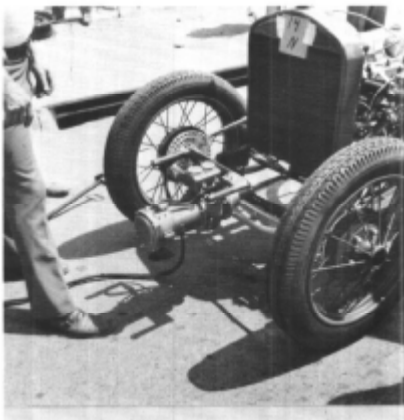
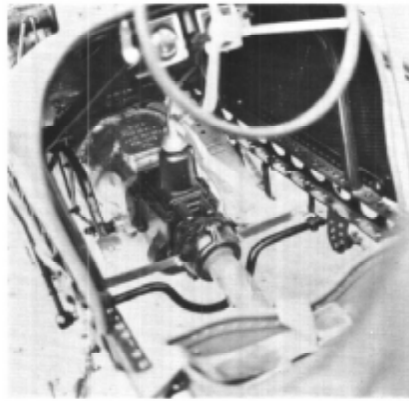
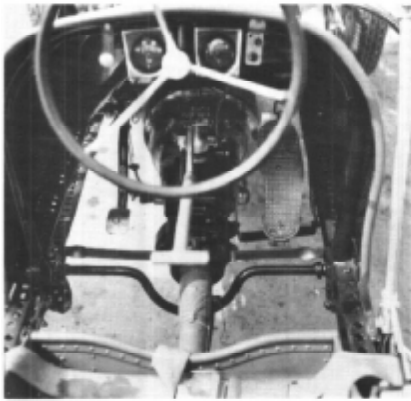
*In 1975 the record was again shattered with a time of just 7.586 by a dragster-type T-powered car. This car caused the race rules committee to make further changes, eliminating dragsters from future competition.*

*This year, still another record was set - first by LaRue Thomas roadster with a time of 7.488 and then by Hank Becker's racer with a time of just 7.423! This new record was set on the car's first (and only) run. Both engines were built by Joe Gemsa (shown at the front of the car in the photo below).*

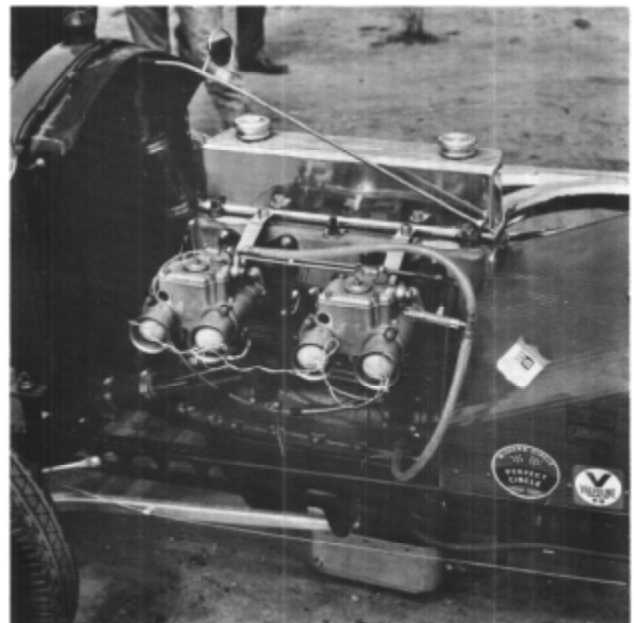




*Hank Becker's Gemsa powered speedster. Hill climb rules call for a T block and a T frame in the Unlimited Class and that's about all there is "T" about the car. Note the many holes drilled in the frame, front axle, etc. to cut down the weight.*



*The engine is started with a portable electric starter which is then removed,*





one paid much attention to such matters but as the participation grew, so did the awareness of the law. This has resulted in a "clamping down" on rules and regulations for participation. While it is possible to switch license plates from another car (though not legal), the car must *appear* legal and this requires things like stop lights, reverse gear and so on. A new requirement this year (for the hill climb) was four wheel brakes on the hottest cars, and this one thing prevented a number of the "regulars" from running. Conversion to four wheel brakes (usually hydraulic) requires considerable modification and since there is no reward other than a trophy and the satisfaction, many of last year's hot cars just didn't show. Members of the Hill Climb Committee told this writer that after a few "near misses" at the top of the hill as the fast cars tried to stop last year, the brake requirement was added to the rules.

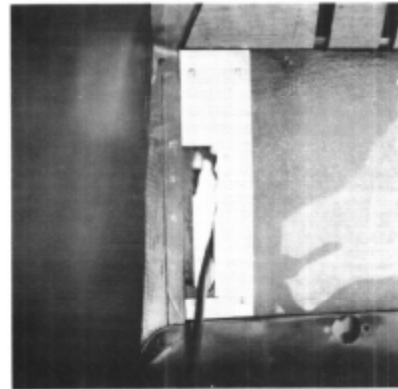
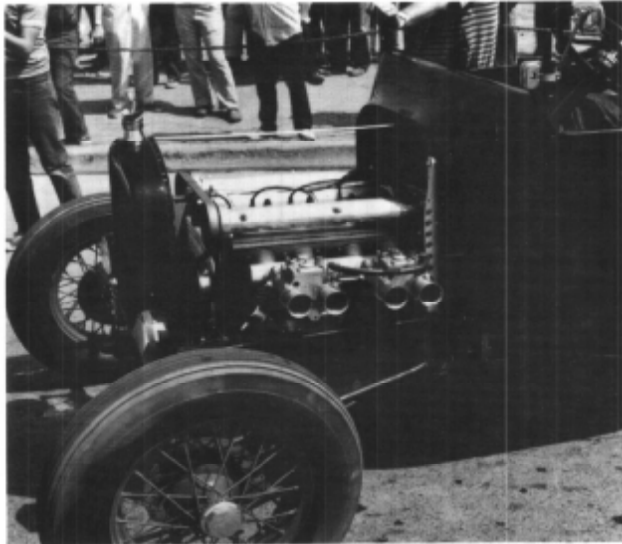
This year's Climb was a winner for one well-known race car mechanic - Joe Gemsa. Joe is one of the few men left who still designs and builds T racing engines (plus other kinds). Not content with modifying old Rajo or Frontenac heads, Joe builds his own. Two of his cars were entered in the hill climb this year and they took first and second in the unlimited class. One car was a dual overhead cam design in a T roadster body, while the other was a pushrod overhead in a speedster body.

The DOC engine had more power but the weight of the body held it to a time of 7.488 seconds, just .065 second more than the top time. The other car was about as light as it was possible to make it. Holes were drilled in just about every piece of metal. Why there were so





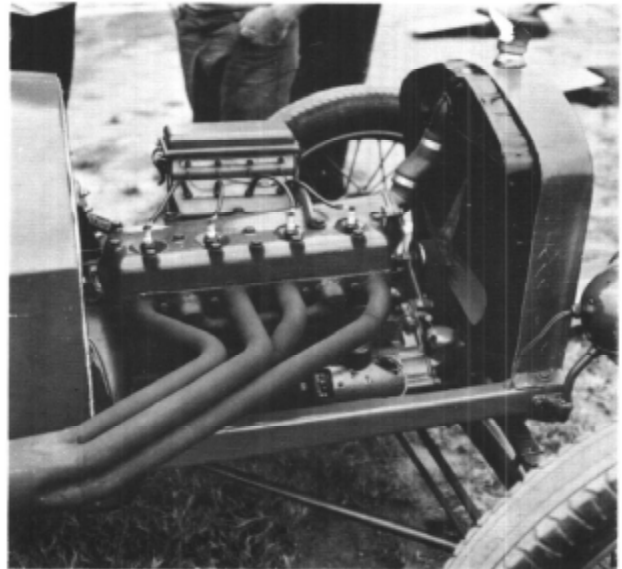
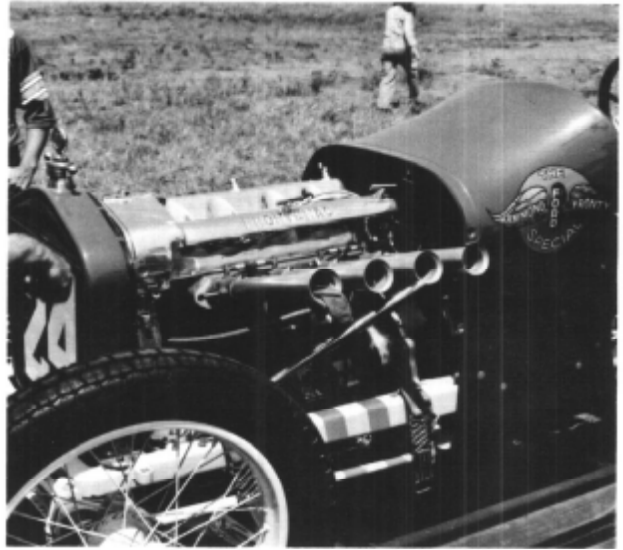
*The second hottest car on the Hill was this Gemsa dual overhead cam roadster owned by LaRue Thomas. While this engine had more power than Hank Beckers speedster, the weight of the roadster body held it back (but by less than a second). The car has an automatic transmission; the ranges of which are selected by moving the 'brake lever.*





many holes in that car there wasn't enough left to cast a shadow!

Another popular event for speedsters is the so-called endurance run. An endurance run is not a race for speed but, rather, it is a race against the clock - to see which car can complete the course closest to a pre-determined time. One of the first of this type of event was the Santa Clara Valley Model T Club's 200 Mile Endurance Run. This Run is limited to speedsters only, stock or otherwise. The Run begins in the center of San Jose, California,





*The half way lunch stop was at Marty Franich Ford, the Ford dealer in Watsonville, California. Here, the speedsters met the Lowland Tour and had a one hour stop for food, rest and adjustments. Franich Ford provided not only the facilities but also had a display of Model T's in the showroom, along with a few of the current models.*

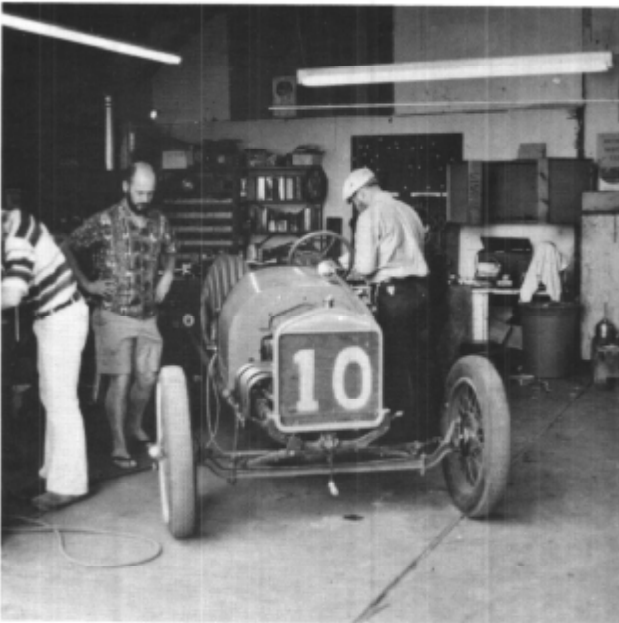
and covers a 200-mile route through mountains and flat lands, ending in Santa Clara. The average speed for the course is between twenty and thirty miles per hour, so it is an all day grind.

It is in the mountains where the speedsters really show their stuff. In this year's run this writer drove his 1968 Barracuda 340 so that he could get ahead of the participants for photographic purposes. The dismal weather in the hills precluded picture taking but we did have the opportunity to compare the [about] 176 c.i.d. T-powered speedsters with the 340 c.i.d. modern car. There is no contest in top speed, or acceleration, and certainly none on the hills, but around those corners the speedsters have the edge. Now the Barracuda is about three times as heavy, and it was well able to keep up with those speedsters it followed but there is a certain ease in which the speedsters made the route while the modern car did a bit of protesting on the turns. There is no doubt that the speedster drivers were having the most fun on the run.

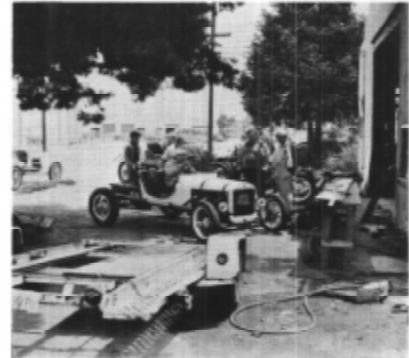
The Endurance Run itself is limited to T speedsters but an alternate route is selected for other antique cars

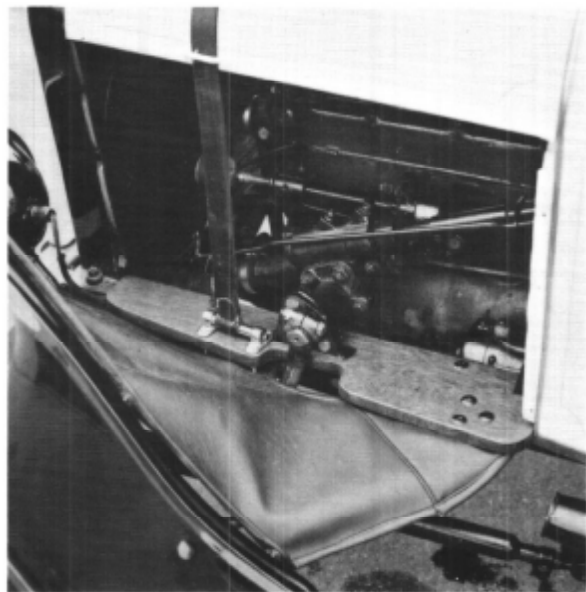
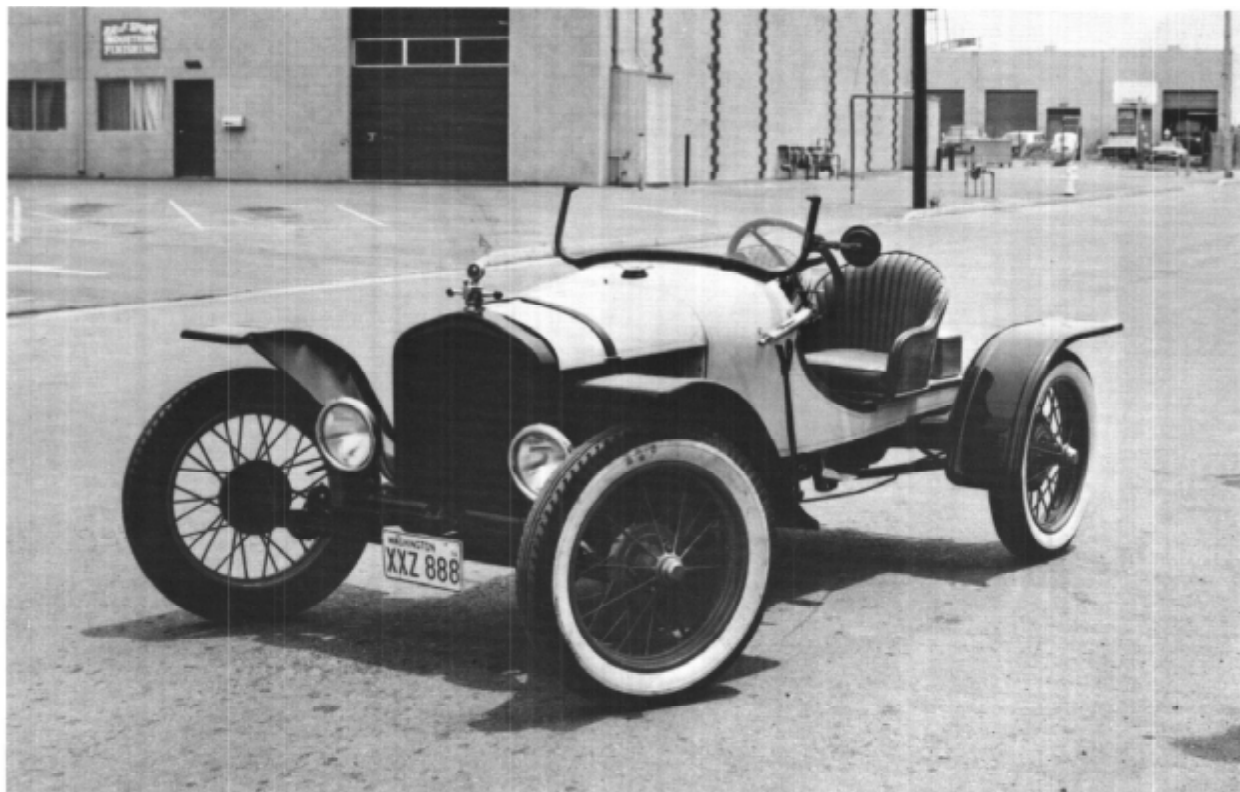


so that participation by all members is possible. The alternate "Lowland Tour" starts at the same place as the speedsters, drives to the mid-race lunch stop where the two groups again converge and then, after the lunch hour, continues to the finish line for the festivities. This double event is one of the best we have seen for the antique car enthusiast.



*THE INSPECTION STATION. Prior to the Endurance Run, all participating cars had to undergo an inspection which covered such details as safety, insurance coverage and conformance with qualifying rules. This inspection took most of Saturday, the day before the Run, and therefore gave time for any needed repairs or modifications. The location was at Doug's Hobby Shop in Santa Clara, and as you can see, many last-minute repairs were made.*

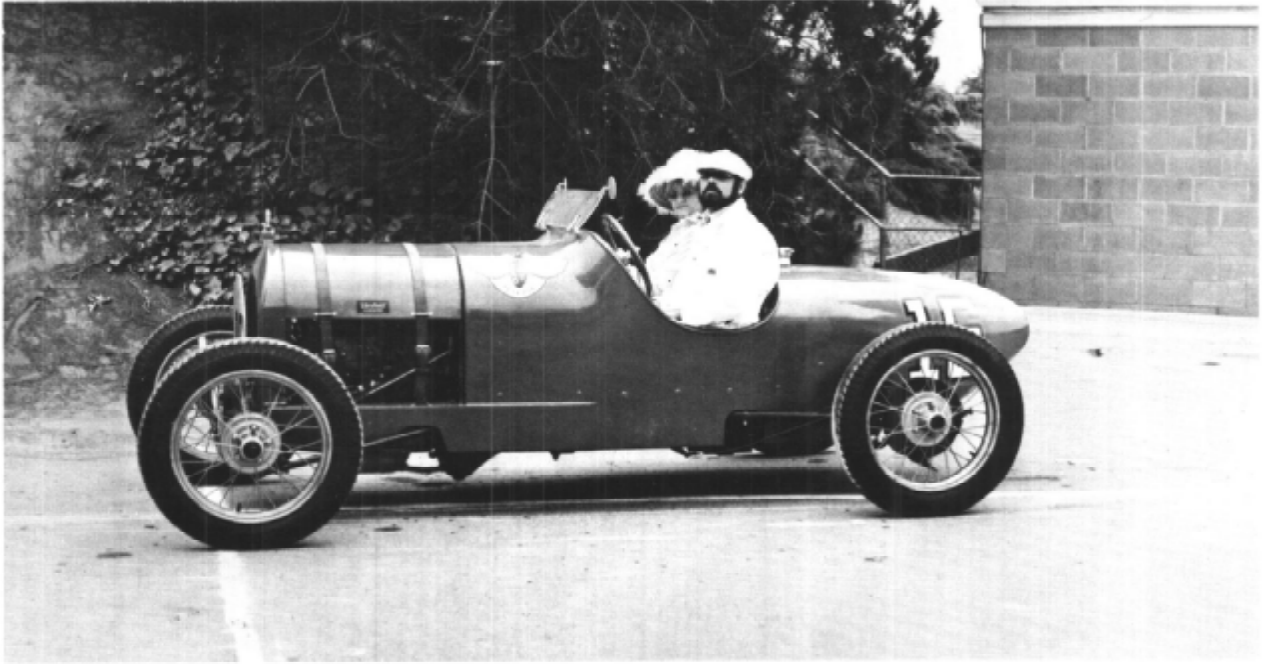




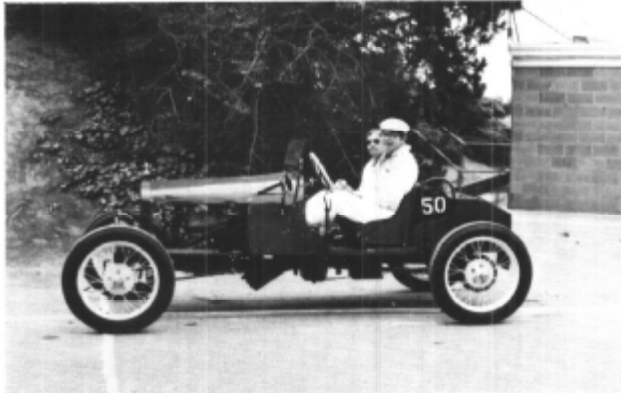
*Jon DeVick came all the way from Seattle for the Run with his beautiful speedster. The engine is essentially stock except for a water pump and Bosch ignition. The fenders are fiberglass and have leather aprons.*



*RIGHT - A check point enroute. There were several places where each car had to be checked in to make sure all covered the right route and that no shortcuts were made.*



**ABOVE - Jim Soares reproduction Morton-Brett speedster features a Frontenac head and a Muncie transmission.**



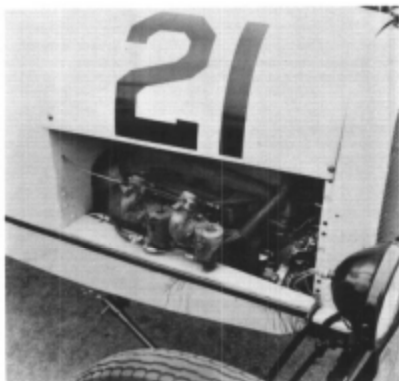
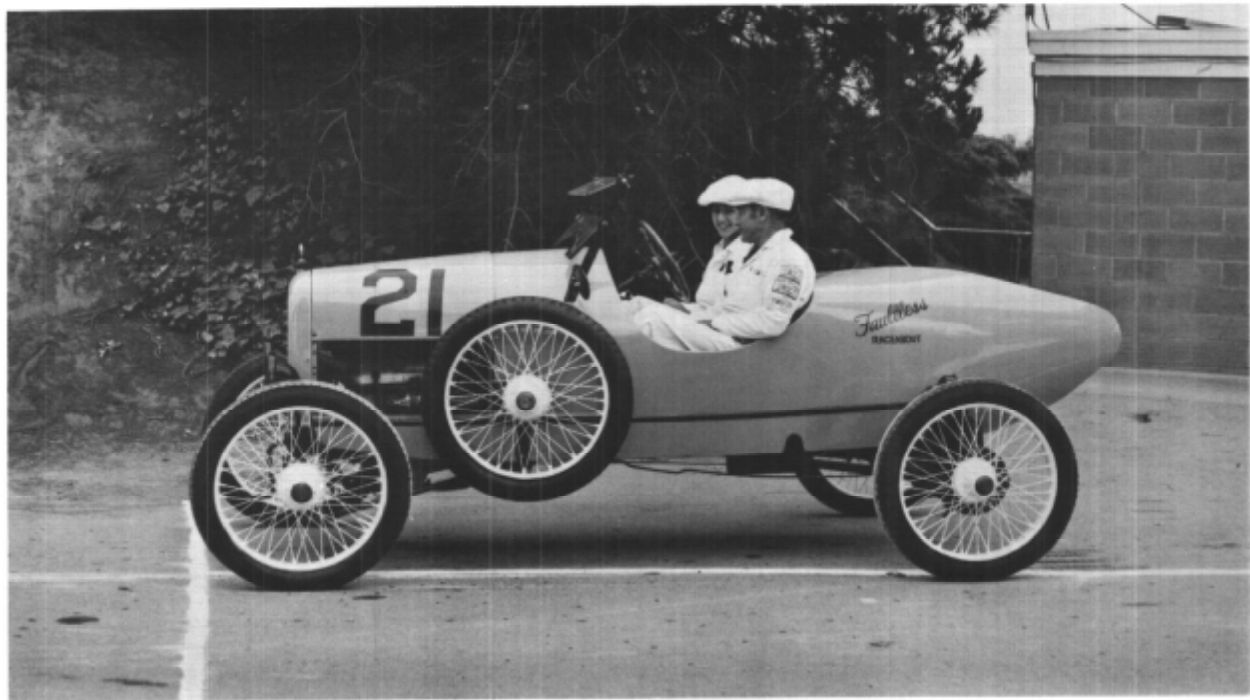
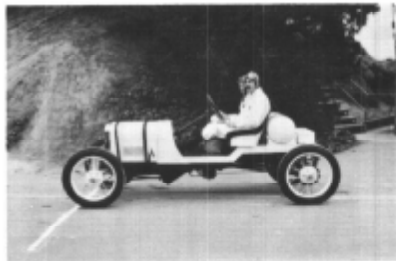
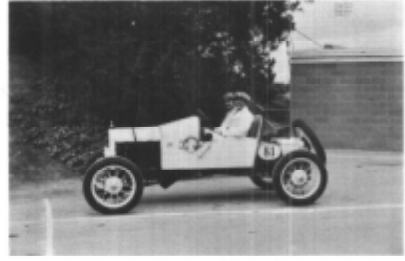
**LEFT- Dexter Clary's home-built, stock speedster. Note the hand rail on the left side - used by the mechanic as a means of holding on while rounding curves (they say).**

**LOWER LEFT - Gary Bausch s homemade speedster.**

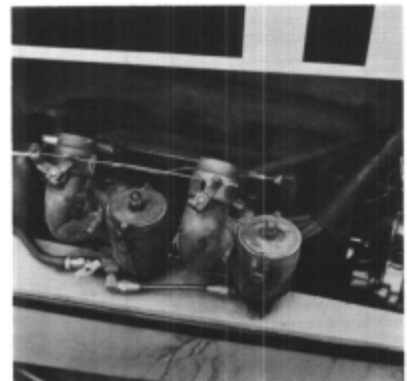
**LOWER RIGHT - Another homemade car, owned by Tom Barretta. The engine features a Sherman head and dual carburetors.**

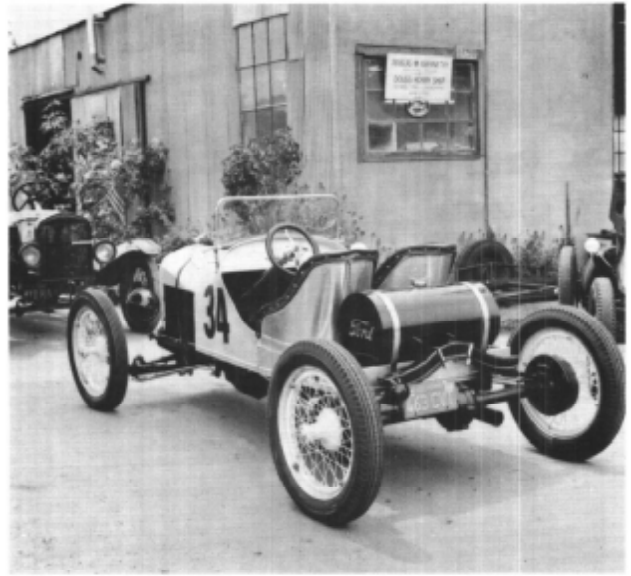
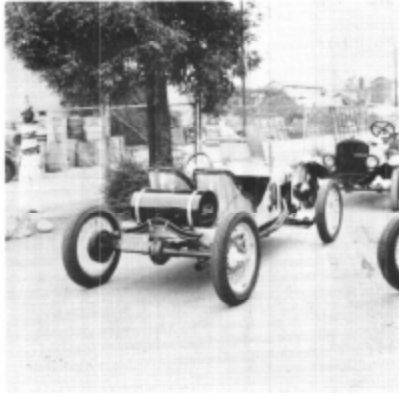




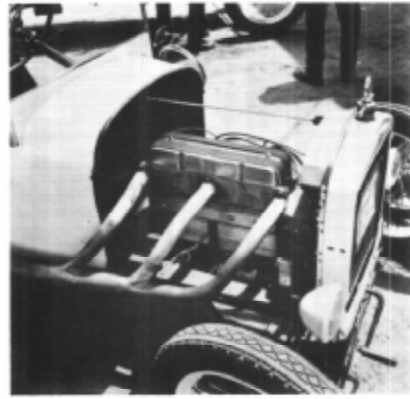
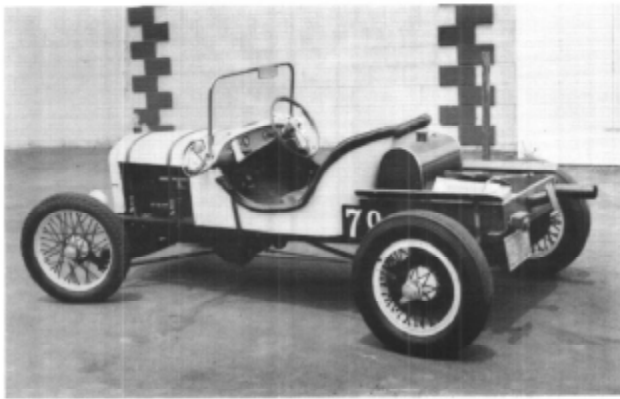
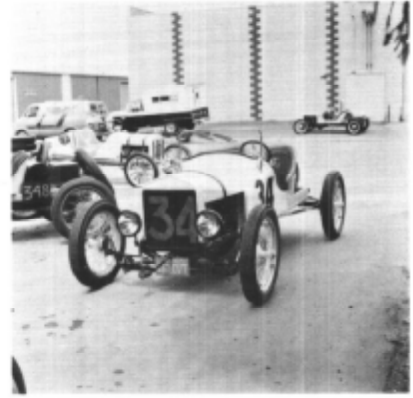
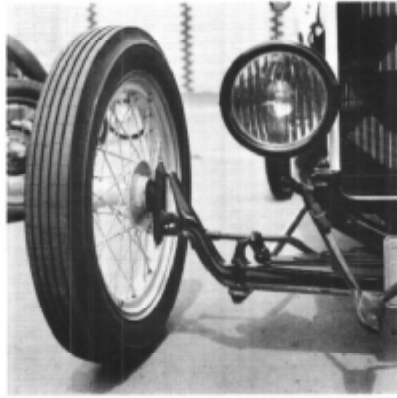


*George Azevedo's Faultless speedster is almost a stock Model T except for the dual Stromberg carburetors and the home-made in take manifold.*



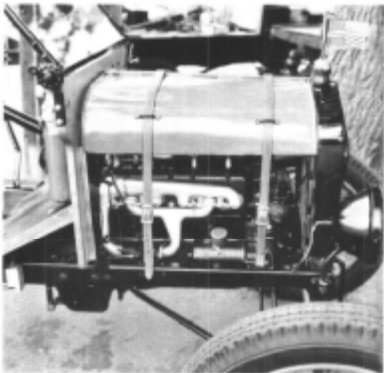
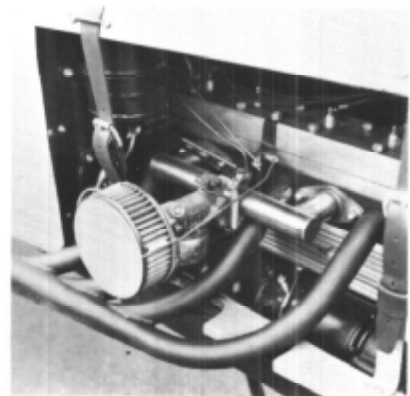
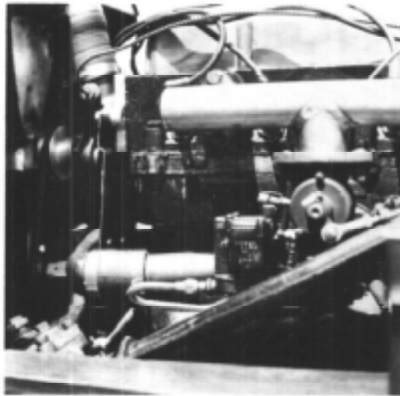
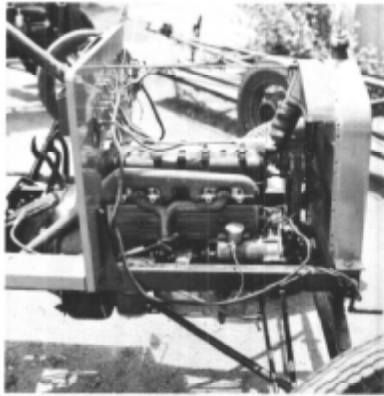


*Pat Church's speedster has a beautiful newly-made aluminum body, done by a real professional. The engine and running gear are essentially stock.*

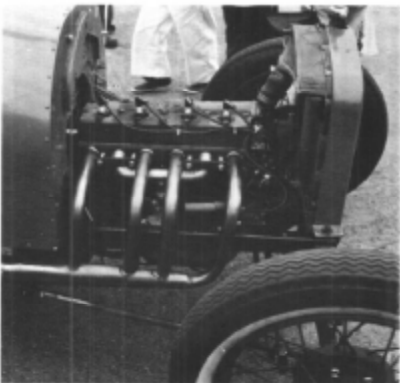
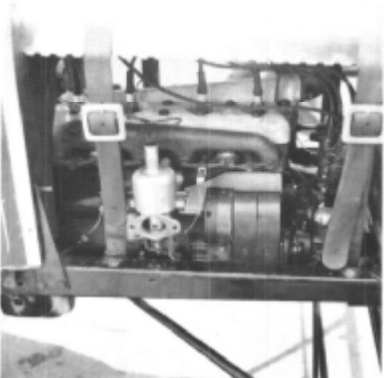


*A cute little speedster-pickup owned by Clark Reesler.*

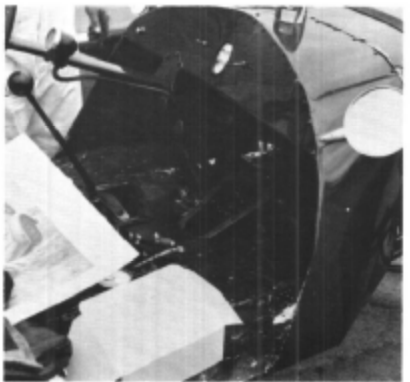
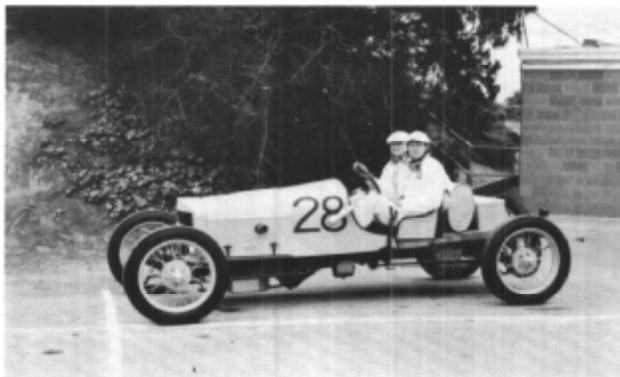




*One of the most interesting features of Clark Reesler's car is the use of a four-cylinder Oldsmobile head on the Ford block. An adapter plate is used to match the Ford head bolt pattern to the Olds head.*



*An interesting homemade flathead was entered by Ray Brindos (Car 41). The head is fabricated from two pieces of aluminum, with the water jackets and combustion chambers being milled in both pieces before they are joined.*



*A common sight at the lunch stop was open transmissions for adjustment or replacement of bands.*

