

The COLORADO "500"

FASTEST STOCK MODEL T ENDURANCE RUN MAY ALSO BE THE LAST OF THE HOT ONES!

Story and Photos by H. H. WILSON



Casually positive that their half-century-old machines are fully prepared for the upcoming full-throttle run across the 8,000 to 12,000 foot high country of Colorado, drivers talk with spectators ten minutes before flag-out at Colorado Springs prior to what turned out to be a 660-mile record-setting Endurance Run. Only one Model T experienced mechanical difficulty which prevented it from finishing the Run, and that was due to a reproduction part failure. Overnight stops were at Gunnison and Aspen, Colorado.

When the checkered flag fell on the Colorado 500 Endurance Run in mid-August, an outstanding 57.2 mph average was registered for the winner. More than a 500 mile run, 660 miles were clocked, 600 of which were timed runs, resulting in an elapsed time of ten hours and thirty-two minutes for the fastest car.

Six lofty mountain passes were encountered, ranging from 8,755 feet to 12,095 feet, with five over 9,000. Despite challenging the roof country of the high Rockies, eleven of the thirteen stock Model T's finished the race with sealing wires intact on the heads and pan, experiencing no mechanical difficulty. The two breakdowns were trailed into the next town where one had a bent crank pin removed from the fan pulley, immediately

resumed and finished the run. The other 1924 roadster was DNF due to failure of a foreign-made reproduction front crankshaft gear which lost some of its teeth because of a porous casting.

Downhill speeds in excess of 75 mph were not uncommon for the front runners as the stock roadsters blazed across the rugged back country of the Columbine State.

Originally scheduled as a 588 mile run, heavy rainfall was encountered in the high country, necessitating selection of a paved alternate route which added seventy-two miles to the planned route. Originally an unimproved dirt road over 10,000-foot Kebbler Pass had been on the agenda to provide a contrast to the rest of the paved

FINAL STANDINGS
(600 miles -timed)

Aluminum Piston Class

DRIVER	CAR	TIME
Cliff Hellwig. Lancaster, CA	1926 Rdstr P/U	10:32
Jack Collins. Lancaster, CA	1926 Rdstr	10:40
John French. Lancaster, CA	1926 Rdstr	11:03
M. R. Watters. Rocky Ford, CO	1926 Rdstr	11:09
Ed Adams. Colorado Springs, CO	1926 Rdstr	11:32
Gert Gelhaar. Edwards AFB, CA	1926 Rdstr P/U	11:46
Joe Wilkinson. Rocky Ford, CO	1926 Rdstr	12:14
Bob Taylor. Lancaster, CA	1927 Rdstr	12:35
Oren Culross. Culver City, CA	1925 Rdstr	Disq.*
H. H. Wilson. Colorado Springs, CO	1924 Rdstr P/U	DNF

Iron Piston Class

Ernie Woodring. Cheraw, CO	1926 Rdstr	11:47
Herb Barker. Mesquite, TX	1924 Rdstr P/U	NT**
Buddy Young. Mesquite, TX	1922 Rdstr P/U	NT**

Open Class

Ed Heltemes. Colorado Springs, CO	1929 A Spdstr	10:32
George Riddel. Pittsburg, KS	1926 Rajo spdstr	DNF

* Disqualified for trailering (bent crank pulley pin).

** No Time, finished entire course under own power.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colonel Hal Wilson, Colorado Springs, retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1971 after thirty years as a pilot, with flying experience ranging from four-engine Liberators, P-51 Mustangs and jet fighters. His old car interest dates from 1958, with a 1928 Peerless boat-tailed roadster coupe, his first restoration project. His first Model T, a 1912 Canadian touring, was purchased during an assignment in Montreal in 1960, for 9800. He currently has five T's ranging from a 1912 Torpedo to a 1926 Roadster-Pickup, driving these alternately with his V-12 Jaguar Roadster. An original 1917 grocery truck from his hometown, Lanark, Ill., is still his favorite and has been driven by its owner from Illinois to the West, to Alaska and back, and has made it up Pikes Peak several times. He is one of the Colorado 500 T Club five and drives in all the Endurance Runs he describes in the article on the Colorado Run in this issue. He wryly notes that his fast T was the only DNF in the August run, due to a stripped crankshaft gear.

route.

Timed mileage was reduced from the 660 miles actually traveled to 600 miles when a sixty mile leg was removed from the timer's records due to a lengthy stop required at a road construction site east of Aspen, Colorado.

The 1976 Fourth Annual Colorado Endurance Run was planned last January by the members of the Colorado 500 Model T Club -all five of them! Probably the smallest single-purpose club of its kind, it has only a treasurer and secretary, appointed by the other three members over the protests of the selected two. All decisions and arrangements are produced by the five in agreement. All drive Model T's in endurance runs when they can find the time to get there.

One of the members works for a nuclear research firm; one is the mayor of a small town in southern Colorado; one is a retired Air Force jet pilot; and another owns an auto parts business. The most recent addition is an industrialist who bought last year's winning car on the spot and is as enthusiastic about this kind of Model Ting as he is about his best blue chip stocks.

With one exception, as is generally true of all endurance run entrants, all are in their late fifties or sixties and all do their own secret tweaking to make their fifty-year-old machines run better and last longer.

The Colorado group became involved in long T runs after visiting the Montana Cross Country Run, now in its seventeenth year.

The Colorado run provides an Open Class for modified T's and other cars, 1931 or older. The Open Class accepts cars with speedster bodies, overhead valve setups, non-standard crankshafts, high speed differential gear ratios, etc., none of which are permitted in the stock aluminum and iron piston classes.

HOW ENDURANCE RUNS ARE CONDUCTED

Three long distance runs of over 500 miles are held in the United States each year, taking place in Montana, California and Colorado, over different courses each year.

Entrants are checked out with a green flag at one minute intervals by a time keeper who records exact departure times on a master sheet. As the Model T's arrive at a predesignated town eighty to one hundred miles distant, short of the first stop sign or restricted speed sign, they are given the checkered flag and the arrival time is noted on a time sheet by another time keeper and flagman who have gone on ahead. Both time keepers synchronized their timepieces beforehand.

Following a forty-five minute gas stop, or longer lunch break, the process begins again.

Legs of the trip are rarely as much or more than 100 miles due to gas and oil limitations of the entrants. Planners usually try for about two hundred-mile days so that the last day of the 500 can be completed early to permit time for post-run inspections.

California and Colorado Runs are followed by award

banquets the evening of the day the run concludes. Montana makes their presentations immediately after the post-run inspections.

Each of the three organizations provide aluminum piston and cast-iron piston classes for stock Model T's. The Colorado Open Class is the only one offering competition for ancient hot rods over a 500-mile course.

The lighter aluminum pistons result in faster times, are easier on the crankshafts and rods and attract the greatest number of entrants. While Henry did not equip the T with aluminum pistons, this exception to the factory parts rule is allowed because new cast iron pistons are not available in any size, let alone the variety of bore sizes T engines have grown in the last fifty years. .060 is the maximum overbore allowed.

Entrants in the two stock classes are confined to "swayback NH Holley, Kingston or Ford carburetors with a throat opening of .710 in size as designed by the factory. Ford script heads, Ford script cams, Ford manifolds, Ford blocks, Ford-type valves with forty-five degree seats, Model T rods and T crankshafts without counterbalances are required. Porting of the block or alteration of the combustion chamber is disqualifying.

One outside oil line, in addition to the standard inside oil line, is permitted. Few of the top place winners use more than two quarts of oil at one time in the engine to reduce drag.

Only six-volt batteries are allowed and the car must run on magneto with the battery disconnected to insure that magnets have not been removed from flywheels. All transmission bands must be installed and operating. Rear end ratios must be standard 3.64 to 1, and are measured by wheel rotation versus engine rotation. Full-fendered bodies are required in the stock classes and windshields must be sealed in the upright position prior to the run. Lead-sealed wires are placed on head, pan and carburetor during pre-race inspections to insure that the entrant doesn't repair or change parts during the run.

Favorite body styles are 1926-1927 roadsters with lower, slanting windshields. Tops are not required and are seldom used.

The average T driver who has a bit of trouble getting his T over the first ridge without overheating will read with disbelief that most of the skilled driver-mechanics have their cars set up to run without fan or water pump and do it without overheating. Most eliminate generators as well.

Probably the most consistent trouble source during the fast and long runs is malfunctioning timer brushes and now and then a coil. Such components are usually inspected and repaired at gasoline stops or overnight stops if a suggestion of ignition trouble is evident. While no penalty is assessed for such repairs, stops along the road for brush or coil changes while under time cost the



Ten of the fastest stock Model T's in the country line up after their 660-mile full-throttle run across Continental Divide passes in Colorado's high country at the finish in Colorado Springs. Left to right: Ed Adams, Dutch Watters, Joe Wilkinson, John French, Cliff Hellwig, Jack Collins, Oren Culross, Ernie Woodring, Gert Gelhaar and Bob Taylor.

driver minutes added to his daily total. In the Colorado run, one driver changed five brushes during the run, resulting in many minutes being added to his elapsed time.

SAFETY ITEMS

Serious attention is given to safety items by the inspection team of the sponsoring club prior to each endurance run. Both back wheels must slide on macadam or concrete, first with the foot brake and next with the hand brake. All three transmission bands must be working with adequate pedal remaining. Tubular shocks are permitted to give more stable handling characteristics on rough roads and curves. Horn, stoplight and headlights are required even though runs are always terminated by late afternoon. Wire wheels which were optional items of equipment in 1926-27 are invariably found on top place cars in the interest of safety, although 30 by 3% tires and wheels are optional. Radius rod, tie rod and steering arm caps are inspected for condition and must be safety wired.

While a check sheet inspection is held prior to the run for safety considerations and rules compliance, a post-race tear-down inspection is conducted on the three winning cars in each class. Heads, pan covers and manifolds are removed to permit a more detailed look to insure compliance with the rules. Disqualifications are sometimes meted out, resulting in the winners or runners-up being replaced for trophies and cash prizes by an entry who has a slower over-all time.

SPEED BECOMES A PROBLEM

The 1976 Colorado Run, which in addition to being the most formidable and longest, was also the fastest under virtually the same rules as the other long distance runs. After reviewing elapsed times the Colorado group has called for a joint meeting of the three sponsoring groups in Montana, in October. The purpose of the meeting will be to formulate a set of standardized rules which will remove some of the top end spunk from the fifty-year-old machines in the interests of highway safety and compliance with the national speed limit.

This voluntary effort is sure to explore the use of unplanned high heads only, use of only cast iron pistons and elimination of the possibility of hop-up tuning secrets developed by canny Model T master speed merchants who have been able to rub two "Ford stamped parts together and start a real fire in the old kettle. This remedial action may come as a rude surprise to many old car types who believe the Model T is a somewhat undependable machine, capable of maintaining thirty-five to forty miles per hour only under good, sea-level conditions.

At the same time, if less knowledgeable T owners are not confounded by the depth of the rules conformity, they may be attracted to these events to learn the benefits of meticulous preparation and to satisfy themselves that the old T can be a thing of pride and joy on

the road in a competition now dominated by the best of skilled Model T mechanics.

INDEPENDENCE PASS - PIKES PEAK

There are about fifty Model T experts in the country who make it a point to attend one or more of the endurance runs each year - and the insiders can name them. Other Model T ers are equally capable in preparing and driving the indestructible car over these distances at full throttle but who haven't the time or interest to join these week-long events. Frequent criticism is also leveled at the hard usage the three-pedaled four-banger gets as a result of the three-day competition. Several illuminating instances can be cited in this controversy to dispell doubts by those of little faith, based on the recent gruelling Colorado Run.

Engine bearing and chassis components required no replacement nor adjustment in any car during or after the 660 miles. You can bet, however, in the interests of reliability that they will be gone over in careful detail prior to another run. Bands were not adjusted or replaced in any of the cars during the climbs over or down the Colorado passes. The most demanding climb over 12,095 foot Independence Pass was taken in high by all the top six or seven drivers questioned. The top cast-iron entry required one short downshift due to traffic on the hill.

The mettle of man and Model T can be judged from the rather off-handed manner in which the winner of the '76 Colorado 500 decided on the spur of the moment the morning after getting the checkered flag to drive his '26 up nearby 14,112-foot Pikes Peak. His only comment was, "That sure is a steep hill coming down!"



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