

Randy Harding (driver) and Kirk Hill in Harding's 1913 Ford Touring. Photo taken at Amarillo, Texas, during the Great American Race.

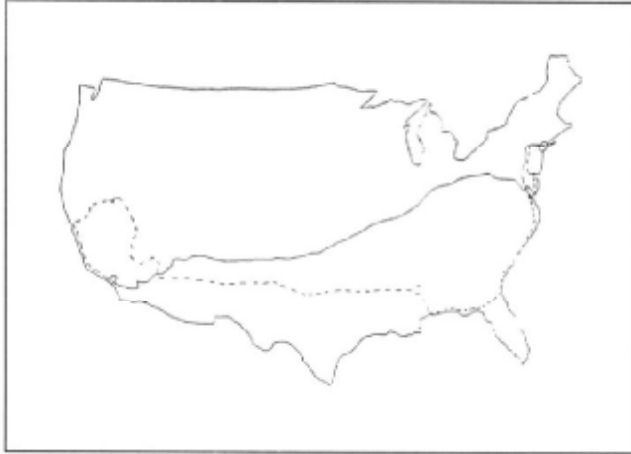
## THE GREAT AMERICAN ROAD RACE in a Model T Ford

By *RANDY HARDING and KIRK HILL*  
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(As edited by the *Vintage Ford staff*)

The Great American Race, sponsored by Interstate Batteries, has been an annual event for several years now and has been followed by old car hobbyists with considerable interest. The 1986 race began at Disneyland, in Anaheim, California on June 25, and ended in New York City on July 5. The route covered 3,500 miles, and the entries were limited to 120 motor vehicles, all of which had to be pre-1937.

Cars entered in the past have ranged from the homeless carriage era to the 1930s, and usually have been somewhat modified to enable them to

stand the pace, although the basic cars remain mostly original. Randy Harding and Kirk Hill decided it was time a Model T Ford joined the race; applied for entry, and Randy's 1913 Touring was accepted for the competition. The Ford is relatively stock except for having been restored, the installation of a larger fuel tank, and electric light conversion. Other modifications included Rocky Mountain brakes, 3 to 1 gears in the rear axle, aluminum pistons, oil dippers on the connecting rods, and a water pump. Standard Ford ignition coils were used, as well as Scandinavian band



The route taken by Harding and Hill. Dotted lines show the "going and returning route, while the solid line is the route of the Great American Race. Total mileage was 8,275, taking twenty-nine days.

linings.

"The T we took was a mighty original '13 touring. We cut a little wood, patched the old leather, painted (thanks *The Vintage Ford* magazine, we knew to look for traces of blue in our obviously black T), and followed the *Ford Service* manual in rebuilding the car. Wanting to run a 'correct T we obviously limited our speed, but we shure held onto dependability. Apart from three problems we ll mention later, Maggie completed the eight thousand mile jaunt without any attention on our part. Folks continue to ask, 'Well, how about the rods? We never adjusted them on the trip. 'How about the bands? The Scandanavia bands never needed adjustment throughout the trip, and we carried four hundred pounds of parts, tools and camping gear aboard, and at highway speeds. The navigator sat shaking his head as for periods as long as three hours he d check our speeds with a stopwatch and mileposts at fifty-five miles per hour, day after day.

"The troubles we encountered centered around the rear tires, rear axle seals, and exhaust valves. Our flats seemed to result from the axle felts leaking oil which let the tires slip in the brand-new rims, as we saw some rim cuts. But never a holed tube; just the missing stem. Exhaust valves burned about every two thousand miles.

Now the obvious way to enter a race that begins in California would be to ship the car to the starting point. Not so in this case. Leaving Jackson, Mississippi, on June 13, they drove the Ford approximately 3,000 miles to Disneyland. The route generally took minor roads and included Fort Worth, Texas; Vaughn, New Mexico; Kingman, Arizona; Boulder Dam, Las Vegas, Nevada; Death Valley, California; Reno, Nevada; Squaw Valley,

California; San Francisco; down the California Coast; eventually to Disneyland. Not the most direct route one might have taken, and certainly not over the easiest and best highways. In typical T-era fashion, Randy and Kirk shunned motels, stopping at campgrounds along the way. As is typical of long trips in a Model T, they met many friendly people along the way, including some who owned Model T s. They arrived in Anaheim on June 22.

"We were scheduled for inspection and impoundment the following day but wished to reconnoiter the inspection procedures, points of interest, and techniques so we d be sure to pass inspection with no hassle. Instead we were waved into the inspection line-up. As we rolled to a stop we met Blair Gibbons and Margie who exclaimed, You guys drove out! Where are you from? Hey! These guys drove out from Mississippi! We d planned to quietly appear and watch the Race unfold, not arrive as a bombshell in the center of the unfolding. All inspection stopped as the questions started and the crowd gathered, and we are as excited at our reception as others seemed at our arrival. The car was placed in a position of honor up front and in sight of new arrivals and visitors.

"The Race formally began (on June 25) and we were off toward Palm Springs. We knew where we were to stay each night but our route instructions were given to us only a few minutes before our starting time each day, and the check points along the route were always a surprise as they were to check our following of the course and staying on time. The first day was tine and we clicked off the instructions, miles and minutes like old hands as we passed many of our competitors overhauled on the desert roads. GAR rules stated that contestants might not recieve aid along the route, so they wanted our aid as little as we wished to interrupt the tedious schedule of timed instructions.

The second day s destination was the Grand Canyon, via Kingman, Arizona. Along the route the



Somewhere in Arizona on the trip west to the start of the Race.

first tire blow-out occurred; an event covered by Japanese camera crews, and supervised the the GAR committee to be sure the drivers got no help from anyone. Upon arrival, and after the evening festivities, Kirk started a valve job, checked the car over and check the GAR status until 2:30 in the morning. He then woke Randy, who finished the job through the rest of the night. They discovered another rim cut but had no spare, and would not have until they reached Albuquerque, the next stop.

The tire did not hold out, and the delay caused another DNF (Did Not Finish) for the second day. In Albuquerque, they met with members of the Albuquerque Chapter who supplied the tires and offered help and suggestions. The second DNF put them out of the running for the prizes, and though disappointed, they were determined to continue just to finish the race. Not being in the actual competition, they could now settle back and enjoy the event, taking side trips and site-seeing, catching up with the main body by taking short cuts.

The fourth day ended in Amarillo, Texas. Each major town through which they passed had a reception committee, and arriving in Amarillo was no exception. Randy and Kirk entered town wearing large rubber noses, complete with eyebrows and mustaches, and became the hit of the scene. Later, an entrant with a 1932 Packard asked, "What kind of a car is that? She answered "Oh! and walked away. Later, the man who owned the car came over and said, "Here I sit with a \$60,000 car and you get all the interest and have all the fun! Next year I m arranging to come in a T!

The next day they were entertained in Clinton, Oklahoma City, Chandler, and Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Model T Club of Tulsa (another MTFCA chapter) not only bought the motel room for the night, they bought supper and had their laundry done! Talk about friendly people.

On towards Saint Louis, stopping at Springfield where they met members of the Ozarks Antique Auto Club and the Heart of the Ozarks Chapter MTFCA. In Saint Louis, they had another grand reception, enhanced by meeting their wives who had traveled there to meet them.

The send-off from Saint Louis was second only to that from Disneyland. The destination was Indianapolis, about 380 miles. Ray Farcus, with NBC, had a camera crew ride with us most of the day. With this distraction, they boys lost their way again -- on TV yet!. Because of this "detour they arrived too late for the spin around the Indianapolis race track, but they did get to park in the center of the track and visit the Indy Museum.

The first stop the next day was at Richmond, Indiana, where a grand celebration awaited. The band played *Dixie* as Randy and Kirk stood at attention. On to the day's destination, Columbus, Ohio. In Columbus they were greeted with another



Miss Magnolia and crew as they crossed the first day finish line in Palm Springs, California.

celebration and rousing welcome.

"Arriving, there were the usual cheers, thrown kisses, hugs and handshakes of which we never tired, and in talking to the Japanese (news crew) we casually mentioned that the DNF s ought to get together as a few seemed in low spirits. Although those who were DNF couldn't compete for the GAR prizes, they still formed a nucleus around which the winner's grand prizes originated, and they were no lesser adventurers than the leaders for at least they had TRIED to win over just talk of it. The Japanese said 'yes, let's form the DNF league. They took it from there and as we helped gather DNF ers they interviewed then on their TV, made it fun, gathered unity -- even pride, and even formed a cheer which quickly corrupted into 'DMF and accidentally got a little out of hand interrupting the day's award ceremonies also taking place in the parking lot. A DMF song emerged, as did a DMF wave wherein one hand waving meant 'Hi, I m OK, and both hands meant 'Help to enable those who could legally accept aid to find it easily. Not all of this might have been appreciated by the powers in charge, but it sure met with the universal approval on the other end.

July 3 they visited Wheeling, West Virginia for complimentary refreshments; on to Bedford, Pennsylvania for lunch, and into Alexandria, Virginia.



A long road ahead! This scene is typical of great stretches through California, Arizona and New Mexico.

“Some of these stops were passed over lightly, but a GAR fifteen minute stop at a small town often wound up lasting as long as an hour and forty-five minutes as EVERYONE had a T and HAD to tell how their shoe tongue, belt, or a bit of bacon rind got them home in a pinch, and how secretly they wondered if their repair might not be an actual improvement on the T even to be considered today!

“Many cars underwent extensive repairs in the parking lots. Several cars would be raised each night on four jackstands with two to six workers surrounding the car, gasoline powered generators running big floodlights illuminating the area. Welding, brazing, soldering, drilling, filing, shimming, replacing, tightening; an unbelievable amount of work was done EACH NIGHT to keep the cars in the race. We did see it ourselves as we did our little valve job, changed a tire, or went for ice cream. We began to feel a little odd as others did so much work and we did so little. \*

On July Fourth, they parked on the Ellipse, a park in front of the White House. They left as the start of the Washington, D.C., July 4th Parade and headed for Harrisburg, then on to Wilkes-Barre, the day's destination.

July 5, the final day of the Race, and on to New York. They were now carrying passengers for the final segment. “In downtown New York we elected to try our hand at a home-grown detour around stalled traffic. After being good and lost for a while, Jay Paris quite voice from the back seat asked, ‘Do you guys know where you are? Our negative reply elicited a You're in the middle of Harlem; get that Mississippi flag down! We left the flag up, but we sure waved and smiled even more enthusiastically after that, and all we saw was friendly.

Leaving New York, they returned to Wilkes-Barre for the awards banquet and closing ceremonies. They bid farewell to many of the other contestants, and all talked of plans for next year.

The Race was over, but the boys were still far from home. Leaving Wilkes-Barre, they headed for Uniontown, Pennsylvania and stayed overnight with fellow MTFCA members, Pat and John Montague. Then on to Yorktown, Virginia via Maryland, Delaware and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. The rest of the trip home was relatively uneventful. They had run a total of 8,275 miles, taken 29 days, two tires, five tubes, five exhaust valves, one fan belt and “lotsa oil and grease.

\*Ed. Note: Many years ago, stopping in Salt Lake City, I visited a group of antique c&s that were making a cross-country run to (I think) Reno. The cars were in an underground garage, and some even had their engines out for major repairs. Back in the corner sat two Model T Fords and I asked “Where are the owners? An entrant whose car was undergoing major surgery replied, “I don't know. They're off having fun in town like they always are, while we do all this work!

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