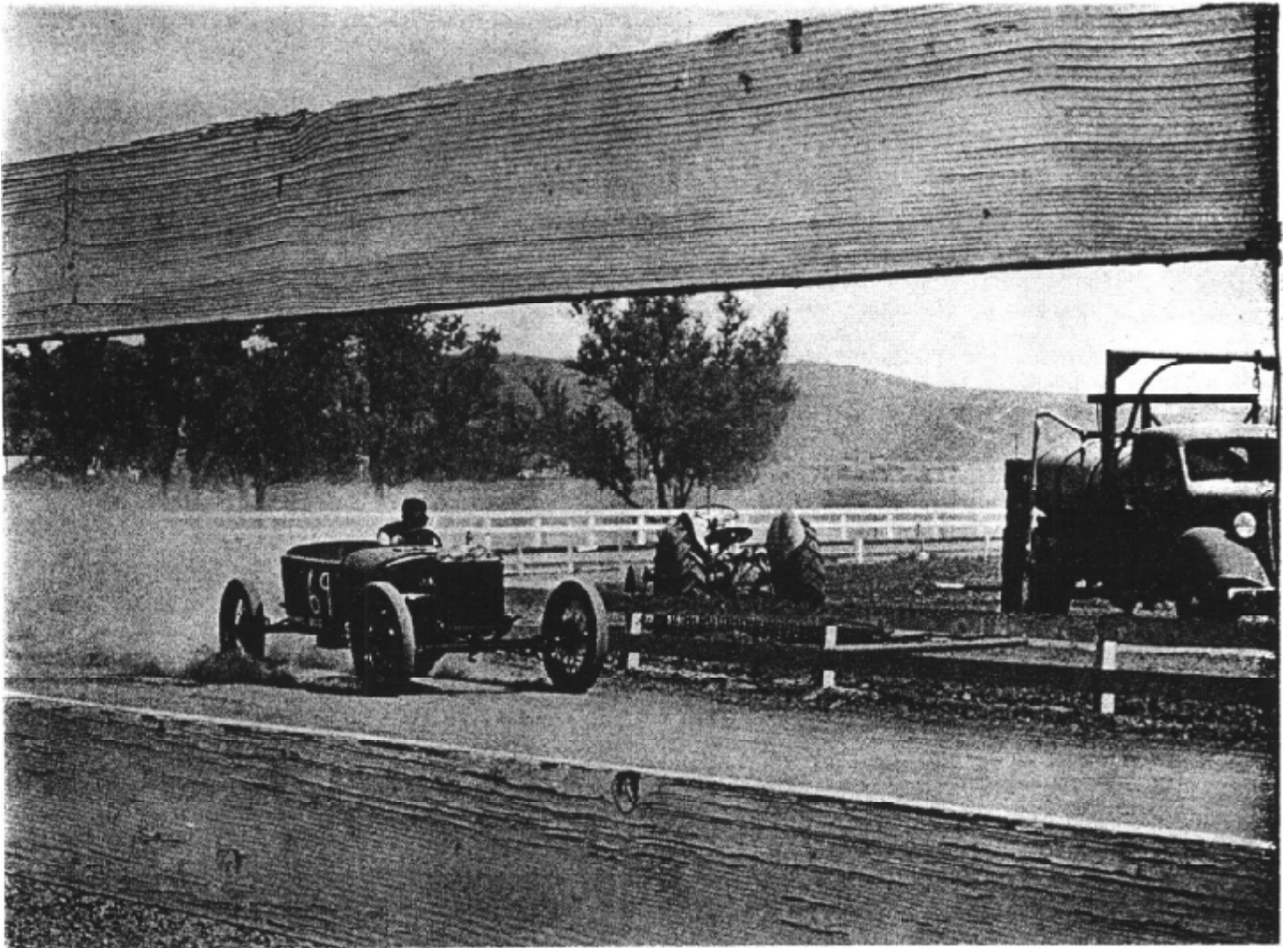


## Yesteryear

In July 1962, Hot Rod magazine published the following article about racing Model Ts . We think you will recognize some of the names of people instrumental in forming the MTFCA and enjoy their activities of thirty years ago.



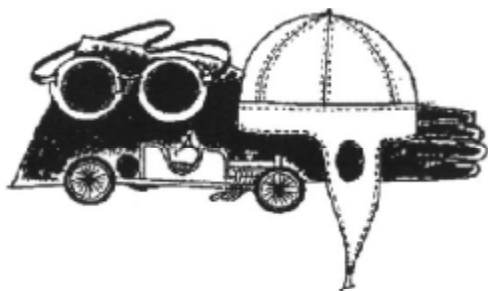
*Pouring it on for all he s worth is Bill Downs in the Downs brothers channeled 'T roadster. Bill placed first in all three stock-engine heats with this revitalized relic, a '26 model running a '25 engine. Note short exhaust stacks, wire wheels.*

## TIN LIZZIES ON A TEAR

Text and photos by Wayne Thorns

*Leather helmets, dusty goggles, booming exhausts-racing as grandpa knew it, by the Southern California Model T Club*

There was only one King of the Dirt Tracks back in the 'Twenties-the Model T Ford. Never before or since has a car so captured the popular imagination-not to mention trophies-as did the 'T. Ford racing slashed across every strata of motorized competition; it was the equivalent of today's drags, sports cars, jalopies, sprints, stocks, midgets



and Indy cars all packaged into one crowd thrilling attraction. Almost every community had its dirt track, banked if they could afford it, but more often flat and crudely hewed from a vacant field.

It was an attempt to recapture the flavor of this period, considered by automotive historians to have been the golden age of racing in this country, that led the Model T Club of Southern California to stage its first annual 'T races. A 3/8-mile, flat, dirt, almost circular, horse workout track in Brea, Calif., was the site. The field was made up of some 20 stock and modified cars. Stock referred to engine without restriction as to body; modifieds required a "T" engine block and frame rails with no other requirements. Entry was supposed to be limited to speedster bodies but practically anything went in this initial race.

The atmosphere at the mid-Spring event was that of an informal, folksy Sunday outing in the country, much as the races of 30 years ago must have been. It came off well. A crowd of about 600 curious spectators, many in early motoring costumes to match their horseless carriage transportation, listened to early jazz and ragtime records over a loudspeaker, munched hotdogs through a coating of dust, and watched the 'T's slither and slide their way around.

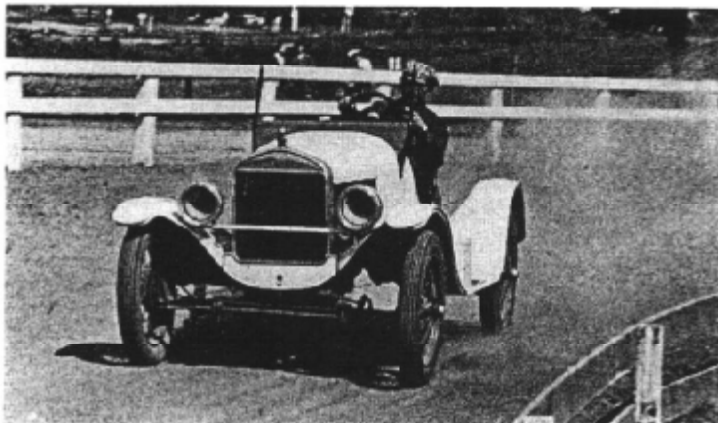
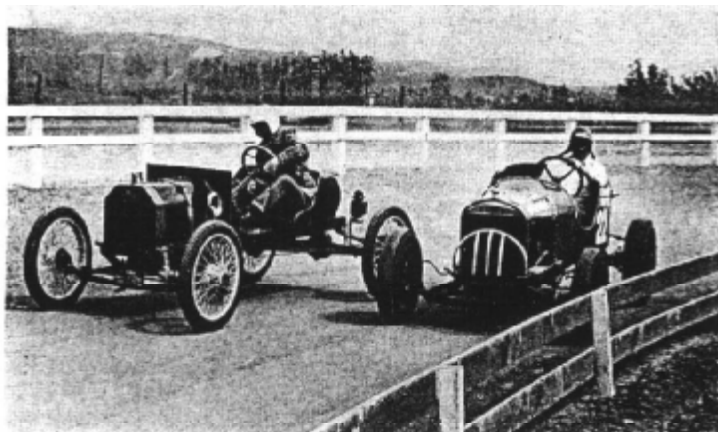
There was however, one important difference from early day racing in this event-only one car

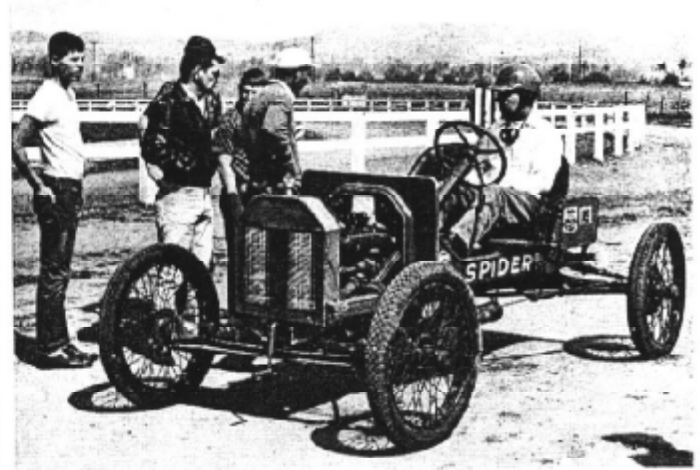
*TOP RIGHT - It looks like a race but it is only a lively parade lap between Harold Henig and Jim Ross. Car on right is modified with modern hydraulic brakes, nerf bar on front.*

*SECOND FROM TOP-Getting a welcome push is Lee Chase (with goggles) whose beautifully modified 1915 model ran out of gas. With bucket seats and brass radiator, yet!*

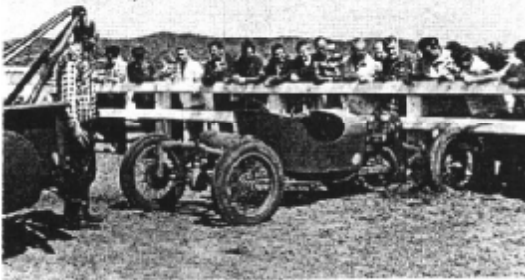
*THIRD FROM TOP-This cherry-bodied model owned by Gail Bozarth ran high in the S-lap sprint heat, finished 2nd.*

*BOTTOM-Starter Carl Rosenthal flags Lee Chase modified in. A non-placer, car was plagued with head gasket trouble, is basically a '15 model running Potvin cam, dual ignition, billet crank, pressure oiling. 50 horses are claimed.*





*Do you remember the "Spider ? HRM did a piece on it, including a Rex Burnett drawing, back in October, 1950. Today the car is still in there pitchin and is still owned by Lindley Bothwell. Driver Carl Rosenthal lost a wheel coming out of turn. The occasion for its write-up back in '50 was a Santa Monica, California road race commemorating Vanderbilt Cup road race.*



at a time was permitted on the track. Reasoning behind this was multi-fold: the club wanted to check out their capacity to stage a speed contest; they wanted to assess the abilities of their driver-members, most of whom had never driven competitively; they had to determine how well the old buckets would take "high speed driving; and they had absolutely no basis for rules about safety equipment, although there were nominal safety inspections for the cars. Typical headgear was a leather flyinghelmet, with only a sprinkling of crash hats, while there were virtually no seat belts in evidence. In this respect, the club had absolute authenticity; such devices were unknown in the 'Twenties. In next year s event, which will be run as a true race, they will require the standard safety items, including roll bars.

What the cars did surprised even members of the club. Both stockers and modifieds were averaging about 45-50 mph around the track. Most of the drivers fell immediately into the pattern of letting the rear wheels hang out while crossing up the steering in the turns. There was only one crash-without injury. Car No. 55, a hot modified, was driven much too vigorously into a turn by Ron Kipling. He ended with his front wheels wedged under the bottom rail of the sturdy plank fence surrounding the track. It was necessary to deflate the tires before the tow truck could free the car.

The 'T s from Lindley Bothwell s fine collection of old race cars were on the scene driven by brothers Carl and Walt Rosenthal. Carl lost a right rear wheel on one car, scratching it from the field. Later, Walt ran the beautiful yellow No. 21 Scorpion around in good time, only to be beaten by younger brother Carl. Walter, it may be added, is well into his 60s. Age would seem to be no barrier in this sport.

*UPPER LEFT — Al Vivian brought this unusual stock speedster. While it didn't win on the track, it did complete a 1447-mile enduro in 43 hours in '61, turning a 62-mph lap on 40-mile course.*

*CENTER—One of the hottest cars (and drivers) was Ron Kipling's modified. It finally spun and wedged under fence.*

*LEFT—On-the-spot magneto repairs, as done by Bruce McCalley who kept boys running despite ignition problems.*

*TOP - Dale Weller did well with a chassis and engine, wore leather flying helmet apropos of headgear used.*

*BOTTOM-Here s another 'one of those beautiful Lindley Bothwell cars, a fine '15 'T with Frontenac ohv conversion competing in the modified class. Walt Rosenthal drove it but was beaten when his younger brother Carl took the wheel.*

Results of the one-lap sprints give some indication of how these cars went. In the stock class it was:

Bill Downs (No. 69)	27.9 secs.
Dale Weller (No. 1)	28.8
Richard Wingate (No. 24)	30.2

The modifieds:

Jim Ross (No. 22)	27.0 sets.
Howard Hertz (No. 38)	27.3
Carl Rosenthal (No. 21)	27.7

Cars were identified by number rather than by year of origin because most of them were cross-bred models, using parts from so many years that it became nearly impossible to pin the machine down and state what it was-other than a 'T.

The drivers had a ball, the spectators loved it, but one question remains: What is it that grips 'T' enthusiasts, prompting them to restore, drive and, in this case, race their ancient vehicles? Actually, the same thing that prompts every car enthusiast-love of machinery. And there is one curious fact which rings a very modern bell-Model T s were the solid basis of today s hot rodding. Anyone who doubts it should dig back into some of the literature of the period. Beginning back in World War I days, and continuing until the Model A appeared, there was more speed equipment built for the "T" than for any other car, before or since. There were speed equipment catalogues with parts that look awfully familiar, even by 1962 standards. It must be concluded, then, that current Model T buffs are really just thinly disguised hot rodders.

It is worth dipping into a bit of "T" racing history for a better understanding of why anyone continues the breed. From the day in 1904 when Henry Ford drove one of his creations 60 mph on ice, the die was cast. The 'T' block soon became the home builder s speed laboratory, and almost anyone with a workable idea for making a "T" move was in the racing game.

One of the industries that centered around 'T's was custom body building. No sooner did an owner coax a little extra performance from his machine than he had to have an open body that looked as

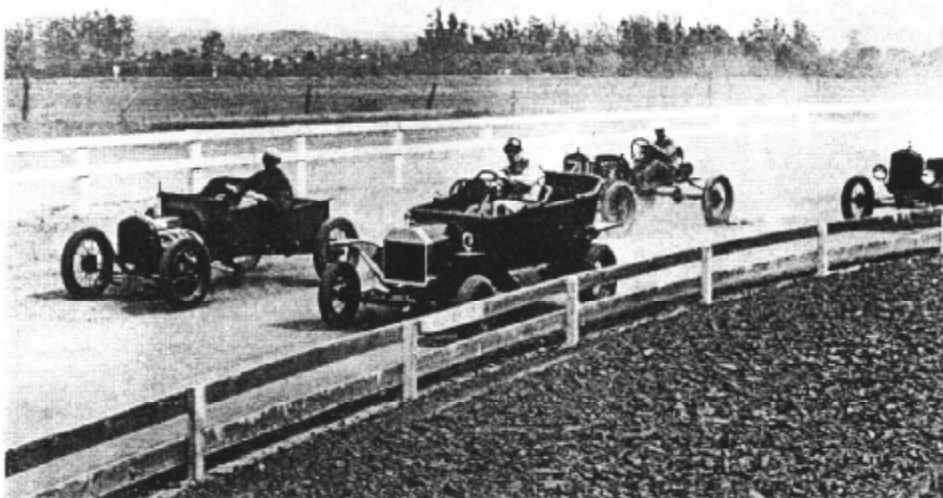


fast as the car. There were dozens of commercial bodymakers and many more individuals turning out replacement bodies, which is one reason why very few "T" speedsters look alike. Some of the firms offering bodies included Laurel Motors (The Race Way), Craig-Hunt (Speedway), Mercury, Morton & Brett, Faultless Raceabout, Bug Speedster and Champion. Prices for amazingly complete bodies, ready to drop on the "T" frame, ranged between \$100-\$150.

Of course, when going to an open two-seater body that vaguely resembled a Stutz Bearcat, it was essential to add an underslinging kit, available from many sources for from \$10 to \$20. A track model dropped the frame and body seven inches; a four-inch kit was recommended for road use. Finally a set of eight solid wheel discs added real class for \$6.

A little scrutiny of some of the equipment bolted on and installed in the modified engines around the Model T Club s pits opened nearly forgotten pages of highly successful Ford performance. At first, about 1916, the tendency was simply to raise compression by switching back to early-model heads. Then came the revolution-the first

overhead-valve head from a C. D. Noonan of Illinois, the forerunner of a flood to follow. Immediately, Craig-Hunt brought out a 16-valve, single-overhead cam head which featured a cam with loose lobes, enabling the owner to work out his own valve timing. About 1917, Robert M. Roof, who later joined Laurel Motors, brought out his 16-valve head (\$115), later followed by a simple eight-valve unit. A year later the Rajo firm joined the



*The boys are shown taking a parade lap in close company. Next year they will be racing in just such tight quarters. Left to right are: Gail Bozarth (modified), Bert Boyd in a modified '14, Richard Wingate (stock), and Al Vivian in a stock.*

ranks of suppliers with a head, while the famed Frontenac, built by the Chevrolet brothers, came along in the early 'twenties.

Head designs were most interesting. The '23 Rajo eight-valve, for example, had manifolding on opposite sides, and intakes so large they almost touched the exhaust valves. Walls between ports were much too thin but when the heads held together they gave wild performance. Probably the most elaborate head ever came from Fronty in '25. It was a double-overhead-cam unit, 16 valves, laden with timing chains, and much subject to breakdowns. These cost \$500 and were built to order under the personal supervision of Arthur Chevrolet.

For the fan who wanted instant racing, several companies offered complete ready-to-race cars at what today sound like ridiculous prices. The Green "Super Ford racer, which weighed 1050 pounds, cost \$1800, or \$2200 for a supercharged version Frontenac had one for \$1700. Stepping up in speed, one could order a replica of the Fronty machine that took fifth at the '23 Indy 500 for any price between \$200 and \$2700, depending upon engine. Properly set up, such a car was good for 100 mph and would

lap a mile track in 45 seconds, a half-mile in 27 seconds.

But the most popular method of getting a racing Ford was to buy the bits and pieces from an almost endless list. For the do-it-yourselfer, here is what Laurel Motors recommended for racing 1918: Their 16-valve head, racing cam, underslinging kit, roller front wheel bearings, counter-balanced crank, Aluminite pistons and rods, 3-to-1 nickel steel rear end gears, a Laurel body, hood and radiator.

Current hot 'T enthusiasts follow much the same lines. Although they must either scrounge and trade for original speed equipment or have modern counterparts built, it is possible to bump the "T"s original 20 hp several times. One driver at the Brea race meet-running a '15 flat-head with dual ignition mag, Potvin cam, high com-

pression head, billet crank and pressure oil system, among other goodies-estimated that he was getting at least 50 hp at the rear wheels. In a 1000-pound car, this makes for reasonable performance.

Model T racing is a fascinating sport as evidenced by the successful experiment pulled off by this club. "T" racing isn't restricted to Southern California either, there being a multitude of special Model T enthusiast get-togethers in most of the 50 states. In Montana, for instance, where ancient equipment abounds, youngsters and old-timers alike gather annually in White Sulphur Springs for slam-bang racing that sets many a spectator to remembering "the good old days. Everyone got all the running-practice and timed single, five and 10 lap sprints-they wanted for their modest \$3 entry fee. As club president Chuck White said, "We'll have three times as many back next year-and some real racing.

*Special thanks to Nigel Hugo of Kenilworth, England for bringing this article to our attention, and to Hot magazine and Petersen Publishing for allowing us to reprint it.*