

THE MONTANA 500 MILE RUN

by Steve Coniff
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For thirty-two years hearty souls in their Model Ts have gathered together in the big sky country of Montana to participate in the Montana 500 Mile Endurance Run. The 1992 Montana 500 was held June 17th through the 19th. Great Falls was the starting point for this year's run. Check-in and inspection was held at the Great Falls Sheraton Inn on the afternoon of June 16th. The first day's route ran from Great Falls to Helena on Interstate 15 with a two hour lunch break and back to Great Falls, a distance of 172 miles. On the second day, the cars ran from Great Falls north to the Canadian border. After lunch the Model Ts returned to Great Falls. The distance covered the second day was 234 miles. On the final day, cars left Great Falls and traveled south 45 miles to Wolf Creek where the run was concluded.

Participants in this timed event must abide by a strict set of rules that have been adopted by the Montana Cross Country "T" Association. Basically, the cars must be full-bodied Model Ts. Most entrants drive 1926-27 roadsters without tops because they are lower and a little more aerodynamic than earlier years.

To highlight the rules: Engines can have aluminum pistons not to exceed .060 over stock. The



Above: Nick Nicholas, Dale Schuler and Jim Halseth going north on Interstate 15 toward Conrad, Montana - with "hammer down."

Below: Bud Peters at the starting line. Bud is a four time winner of the Montana 500.



deck of the cylinder block and the cylinder head (high heads only) can be milled as much as one wants. Steel valves with a head diameter not to

exceed one- and one-half inches may be used. A Ford script cam shaft must be used; however the lobes can be modified and reground as long as the script is not removed. The use of dippers on the rods and an outside oil line are allowed. Engines must use the Ford or Holley sway back carburetor. The association requires that a restrictor plate furnished at the time of inspection be used between the carburetor and the intake manifold. This restrictor plate rule was adopted to help slow down the field in the interest of safety. Even with the restrictor plate, which reduces the air flow from 1-1/16 inches to 11/16 of an inch, many cars can still run in the high 50 s on level stretches with no wind. Balancing is allowed and is a must. Braided steel wire with a lead seal is used to seal the head, carburetor and oil pan inspection plate so they can not be removed during the run. Hyatt bearings must be used in the rear axle along with the standard 40-tooth ring gear and 11-tooth pinion. All cars are required to use the standard Model T ignition system, which when set properly works quite well. Working within the rules each T owner has to use every bit of knowledge and ingenuity at his disposal to be competitive.

Ominous clouds loomed over Great Falls. Rain was in the forecast. Dark clouds and the threat of rain however, couldn't dampen the excitement that was in the air as the 1992 Montana 500 began. This year's starting lineup had a field of twelve cars which included a number of veteran drivers and former winners. Starting positions were drawn from the hat the night before at the

driver's meeting. Cars were flagged out at one minute intervals. After starting, each car drove until flagged in by the timers. Day one and two each had four legs, two in the morning and two in the afternoon with a driver's meeting each evening. At the driver's meetings, times were handed out and the next day's starting positions were assigned. The order of finish each day was inverted for the next day's starting lineup.

Fortunately, only scattered rain showers fell on the first two days and by noon each day the sun had made its appearance. On the third day skies were blue and conditions were perfect for the last leg of the run.

When the checkered flag fell, Richard (Nick) Nicholas of Pueblo, Colorado with a time of 8 hours 14 minutes and 49 seconds, was the winner. Nick's average speed for the three day event was 50.4 miles per hour. After the last car had been flagged in, all twelve cars went to the Missouri River Inn. At the Inn everyone ate a picnic lunch and received their times and awards. Twelve cars started and twelve cars finished the 451 mile run. Since the route changes yearly, the mileage does too. Some years the run will be over 500 miles and other years it may fall a little short.

To add to the excitement of this year's 500 a touring group with Model Ts and Model As came to see the three day event. The group, headed by Bob Johnson of Ontario, California, was on its way to Fort Simpson in the North West Territories. Their smiling faces and friendly waves of encouragement could be seen all along the route.

A Brief History of the Montana 500

The first running of the Montana 500 was in 1961. It was started by a group of enthusiasts calling themselves *The Cross Country Model T Drivers*. On August 30, 1962, Ed Towe of Helena called a meeting in Circle, Montana. Out of this meeting *The Montana Cross Country "T" Association* came into being. Later that same year the club was chartered.

From its inception until the early 1970's the endurance run ran on secondary roads the entire distance with a new location each night. This was a problem for the support people and families who followed the cars. To help simplify things for everyone, the association adopted the hub concept. The participants now run on the interstate, never going much farther than 100 miles from the starting point.

In the beginning, the 500 had two classes, the cast iron class and the aluminum piston class. The aluminum piston class was the most popular and after a number of years and declining participation, the cast iron class was abolished.

Each year in the fall a meeting is held to go over changes in the rules and to pick a route for the next year's run.

The Montana Cross Country "T" Association would like to invite new people to join the club and participate in future 500 runs.

For information write to:

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