

# MONTANA CROSS COUNTRY "T" ASSOCIATION

## *-the Model T equivalent to NASCAR*

by Jay Klehfoth



*Artist Don Greytak's interpretation of an early "Montana 500" race*

It all began in 1961 when a group of Model T enthusiasts, calling themselves *The Cross Country Model T Drivers*, informally gathered to see whose Model T was the quickest. They charted and ran a 500 mile endurance race in the big Sky Country of Montana. And by all accounts, the race was great fun.

In August the following year, Ed Towe (of Towe Museum fame) called a meeting of the prior year's participants and a few other interested souls-and the meeting resulted in organizing *The Montana Cross Country T Association*. The sole purpose of this organization was to plan, promote, and establish rules for an annual 500 mile endurance race-and see whose Model T was the quickest. And they have been doing this ever since.

The race is limited to stock Model Ts-there are no racers, speedsters, nor hopped-up cars. The cars must be stock, full-bodied, and must have "stock Model T engines and drive trains.

In the beginning, there were two classes: one for cars with cast iron pistons and one that allowed aluminum pistons. The aluminum piston class was the most popular; to simplify the rules, the separate class for cast iron pistons was abolished.

Initially, the race was run on secondary roads and each night was spent in a different location. As this posed a problem for families and support people, the race is now organized as a hub event. Each morning the cars leave and return to the original starting point. Additionally, the race is principally run on interstate highways for safety reasons.

## Rules

- 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 the earlier models.)
- Engines can have aluminum pistons not to exceed .060 over stock.
- The 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 1-1/2 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.
- 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-no distributors.
- Balancing of components is allowed.

In addition, the association requires that a restrictor plate furnished at the time of inspection be used between the carburetor and the intake manifold, which reduces the air flow from 1-1/16 inches to 11/16 of an inch. This restrictor plate rule was adopted to help slow down the field in the interest of safety.

After the cars are initially inspected, a braided steel wire with a lead seal is used to seal the head, carburetor and oil pan inspection plate so no components can be removed during the run.

*Shown below is an 11/16 restrictor plate that is inserted between the carburetor and intake manifold to slow down the Model Ts on the Montana 500*



## The Race

- The race is run over three days.
- Starting positions for the first day are drawn from a hat the night before at the driver's meeting.
- The following morning the cars depart at one-minute intervals.
- After starting, each car is driven until flagged in by the timers at a check point.
- Typically, there are four legs each day; two in the morning and two in the afternoon.
- There is a driver's meeting each evening. At the driver's meetings, times are handed out and the next day's starting positions are assigned. The order of finish each day is inverted for the next day's starting lineup.
- Since the route changes each year, the exact mileage does too. Some years the run will be over 500 miles and other years it may fall a little short.

## Results

Last year's winner of the 36th annual run was Nick Nicholas of Pueblo West, Colorado. Nick's total elapsed time for the 489 miles was 10 hours, 18 minutes and 43 seconds-for an average speed of 47.4 miles per hour.

Now, you may say, "47.4 MPH isn't that fast. However, keep in mind that this is the AVERAGE! Given that there were twelve legs over the three days requiring a standing start for each leg, hills (mountains) to climb, etc.-how fast do you think Nick must have been going at top speed?"

The slowest finisher in this year's race was a respectable-scratch that-impressive 44.4 MPH.

Who says stock Model Ts are slow? The participants in the Montana 500 certainly demonstrate that a stock Model T, properly built and tuned, will run at modern-day highway speeds. And just think-what speeds would they attain if they didn't use restrictor plates!

## 1997 Race

The 37th annual *Montana 500* will be run out of Lewistown, Montana from June 16-19. If you want to test your skills and see what your Model T will do, mark your calendar and start getting ready. If you are interested in seeing how the "big boys" do it-it is worth the trip and spectators are welcome. If you would like to support the organization-they are accepting new members. Or, if you would merely like to congratulate them, you may do so by writing Montana Cross Country Model T Association, c/o Tony or Janet Cerovski, 1004 Sioux Road, Helena, MT 59602. Phone (406) 458-9450.