

ROADSTER RACING-1932

By Don Radbruch

Photos from the Rich Slawson Collection

Ed. Note: Don Radbruch is the author of Roaring Roadsters, a book about the history of track racing hot rod roadsters from the 1920s to the early 1950s. This type of racing started with cut-down, souped up Model Ts. The author also has first-hand experience as he raced track roadsters beginning in the late 1940s and then moved to sprint cars, midgets, stock cars, and sports cars before retiring in 1967.

Racing with modified roadsters, mostly Model T Fords, began in about 1924. There was racing in half a dozen states but the events were intermittent and, for the most part, poorly organized. The first recorded series of well promoted roadster-races was in Southern California in 1932.

Bill Slawson was the man who got things going when he formed the California Speedway Club Inc. Races were held weekly on dirt tracks at Jeffries Ranch (owned by former heavyweight champion Jim Jeffries) in Burbank, on a three-quarter mile oval at Huntington Beach and, occasionally, on a couple of other tracks.

Even though times were tough due to the ongoing depression the roadster races proved popular with both competitors and fans. Admission to the races was fifty cents but discount coupons which brought the cost down to thirty cents were apparently plentiful. The payoff to the racers was good enough to attract very large fields. Winning the main event usually paid from \$40 to \$75. Much of the purse money was up front but there was a five dollar guarantee for everybody-five bucks would buy a lot of groceries in 1932.

Most of the roadsters were Model Ts. The rules, if any, are unclear but it was just like today-the more money you

AUTO RACE PROGRAM

July 3 — 1932 — 2 P.M.

Auspices California Speedway Club Inc.

HTGN ENTRY LIST BEACH

No.	DRIVER	MAKE	CITY	Qualifying Time
2	Jack Rand	Winfield Flat T	Glendale	40-03
3	Oliver Burton	Fronty T	Covina	42-06
5	Freddie LaHague (O'lds)	Miller-Stofield	Los Angeles	43-00
7	Met French	Cragar A	Los Angeles	44-05
8	Chris Yeat	Rajo T	Los Angeles	44-07
9	Floyd Desmond	De Soto	Riverside	43-06
10	Joe Moustli	Ray A	Hollywood	43-06
12	Tommy Newton	Rajo T	Downey	43-06
14	Kelley Thomas	Chev 4	Los Angeles	
17	Rex Bean	Essex 4	Long Beach	
25	Kenny Jacobson	Rajo T	Pasadena	
26	Geo. Robson	Ray A	Huntington Park	43-03
27	Rex Mays	Rajo T	Riverside	
28	Wm. Slawson	Miller A	Long Beach	
37	Wayne Morrison	Fronty T	Sierra Madre	44-00
41	Frank Weasne	Fronty T	Pasadena	
43	Vic Hill	Flat A	Los Angeles	
49	Kenneth Weiland	Chev 6	Glendale	
52	Chris Broberg (Outriders)	Chev 4	Los Angeles	47-08
53	Wm. Matich (Outriders)		Los Angeles	
55	W. E. Hartgrove (O'lds)	Durant 4	Los Angeles	
75	Earl Gilbert	Fronty T	Los Angeles	
75	Ed Walker	CHEV 4	" "	42-08
84				45-03
85	Babe Sawyer	CHEV 4		41-06
45		RAJO T		47-06
47	Floyd Roberts	Flat A	VAN NUYS	41-00

Next race will be held --- July 17th 1932

No.	DRIVER	MAKE	Qualifying Time
97-		Race Cars	48-06
68		FLAT T	43-06
42		CHEV EVENTS 4	46-06

Fast Three Cars in 10-Lap Events Qualifying For Main Event

Lap	1st	2nd	3rd	
1. C. S. C. Dash	54-06	3	47	85
2. 10-Lap-Time	47	6	83	
3. 10-Lap-Time	75	7	26	
4. 10-Lap-Time	48	8		
5. Corotation	9	12	57	

Main Event

Lap	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
6. 25-Lap-Time	6	75	8	7

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Courtesy of

Dixon's Chapel

Huntington Beach

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NEHI

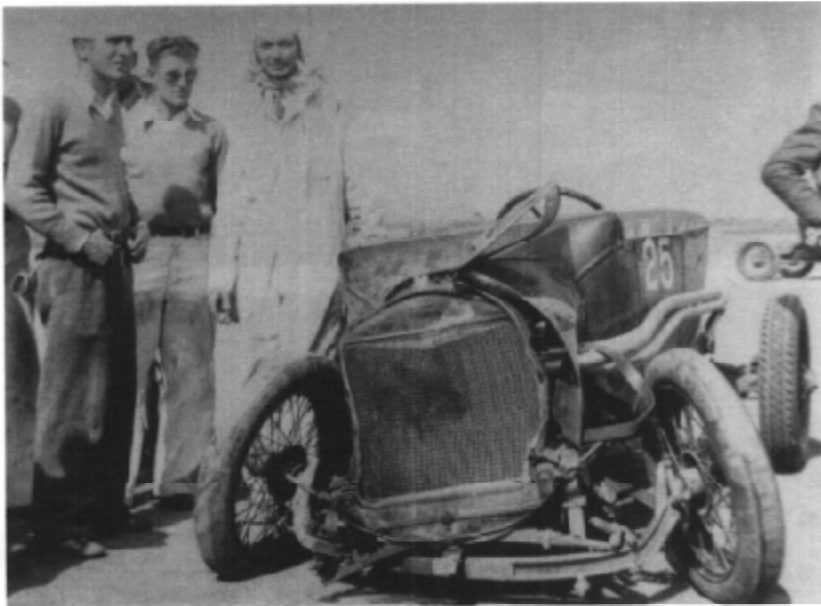
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DRINK at the NEHI Stand

July 3, 1932 Entry List from Huntington Beach. The 1932 Southern California roadsters trained some very good race drivers. Four of the drivers on this July 3, 1932 Huntington Beach entry list went on to race at Indianapolis. Sadly, eight of the drivers would die in race cars.

From the Jeff Sharpe Collection

had the faster you went. A mildly hopped up stripped Model T was capable of 70 MPH and some of the faster cars, with Rajo or Fronty OHV conversions, could hit near 100 MPH. There were a few other makes mixed in with the Ts-the four cylinder Chevy engine was very fast and an occasional Essex or Dodge could be competitive. Somewhat surprisingly the big winner was a relatively heavy Model A roadster. Promoter Bill Slawson drove this car and it had a very good Miller-Schofield



Above: *Kenny Jacobson is shown with his well bent Model Tat Huntington Beach. Jacobson was one of the many roadster drivers who moved on to race at the legendary Legion Ascot Speedway.*

Below: *A totally wrecked Model Tat Huntington Beach. few, if any, of the drivers used seat belts and, perhaps in a crash like this it was better to be thrown out of the car.*



A pit scene at Huntington Beach, California in 1932. The primitive speedway had no grandstands.

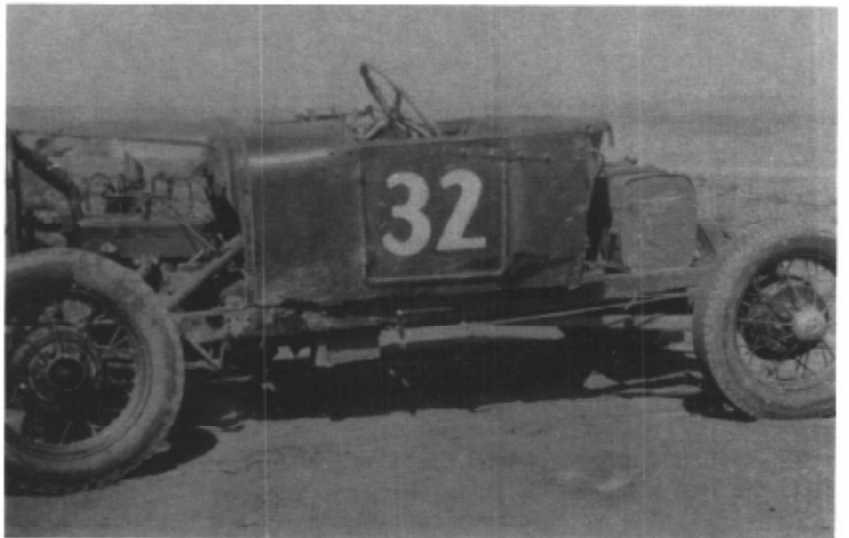
OHV engine-sounds like Slawson won a lot of his own purse money.

Most of the drivers were beginners and there is no doubt some were attracted by the prospect of winning "big money. Crashes were common as not only the drivers made mistakes but the flimsy roadsters broke spindles, axles and steering parts with frightening regularity. The racetracks were narrow, rutted and often dusty. Huntington Beach had its share of crashes but there were no fatalities. On other tracks in the area, Frankie Gargolo, Oliver Burton, Wayne Gause, Johnny Pastovich and Johnny McGrachen all died within a short period of time. It must be remembered that racing was much more dangerous in those days than it is now and the casualty rate, even among the more experienced race drivers, was also high.

The California Speedway Club did more than its share to train the race drivers of the 1930s and 1940s.

Half a dozen roadster graduates made it to the Indy 500, including winners Floyd Roberts and George Robson. Two-time national champion Rex Mays also got his start in the Southern California roadsters. Other roadster drivers moved on to star in the midgets or sprint cars.

The weekly roadster races ended in late 1932. The reason for this is uncertain but a serious racing injury to California Speedway Club President and promoter Bill Slawson may have had something to do with it. Many of the better drivers picked up race car rides at nearby Legion Ascot Speedway. This deadly track was operating on a weekly schedule and paying huge purses. Roadster racing in Southern California continued with occasional races, but it was not until after World War II that the sport enjoyed another season like that of 1932. 0



Top: The fate of the driver of this Huntington Beach crash is unknown, however the exposed fuel tanks provided an additional hazard.

Above: Herb Balmer climbs out of his Rajo T after a dusty Huntington Beach race. Balmer later raced at Legion Ascot and was killed while practicing for a stock car race at that track.

Bottom Left: A typical Model T roadster that raced in Southern California in 1932-hardly beautiful but, nonetheless as fast as many of the race cars of that era.