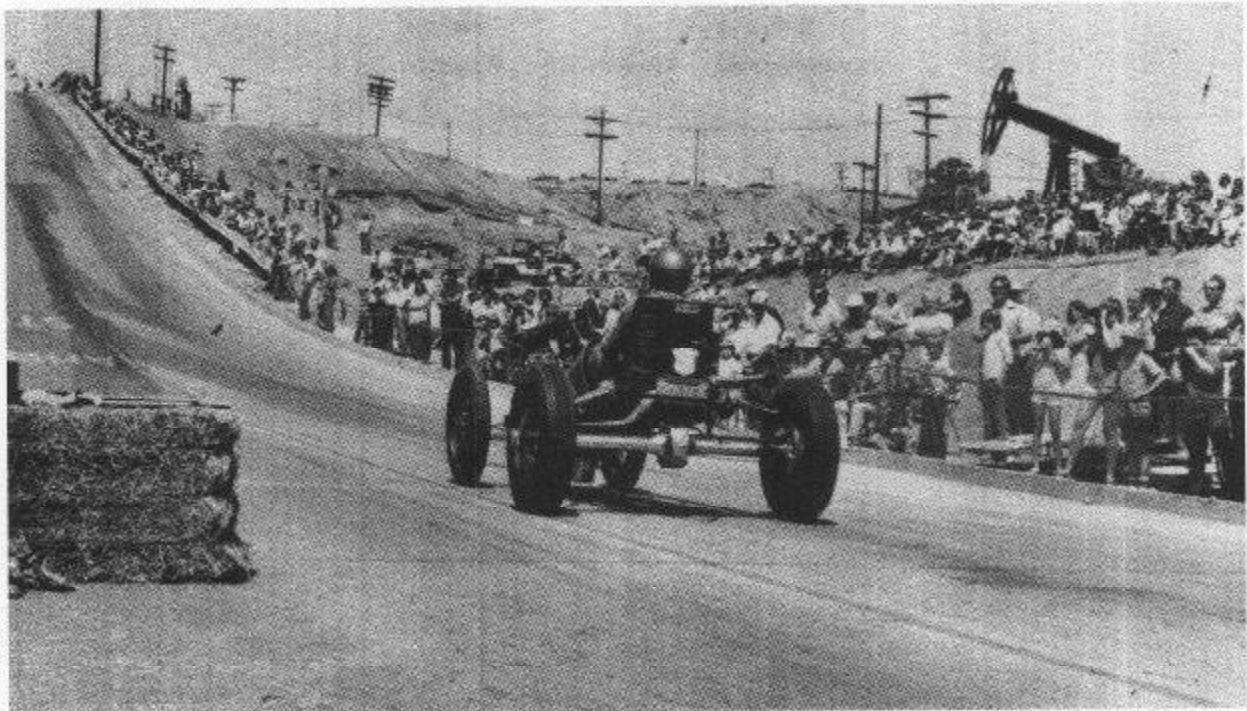


Where Are They Now?

Hank Becker's Hill Climb Car Will Roll Again!

By Jay Klehfoth



In the summer of 1976, Hank Becker became "King of the Hill" in his radical hill climb car in Long Beach, California

The July-August 1976 (Volume 11 Number 4) of this magazine featured a review of the twentieth running of the famous Long Beach Hill Climb, also known as the Shell Hill Climb. As the editor of yore stated,

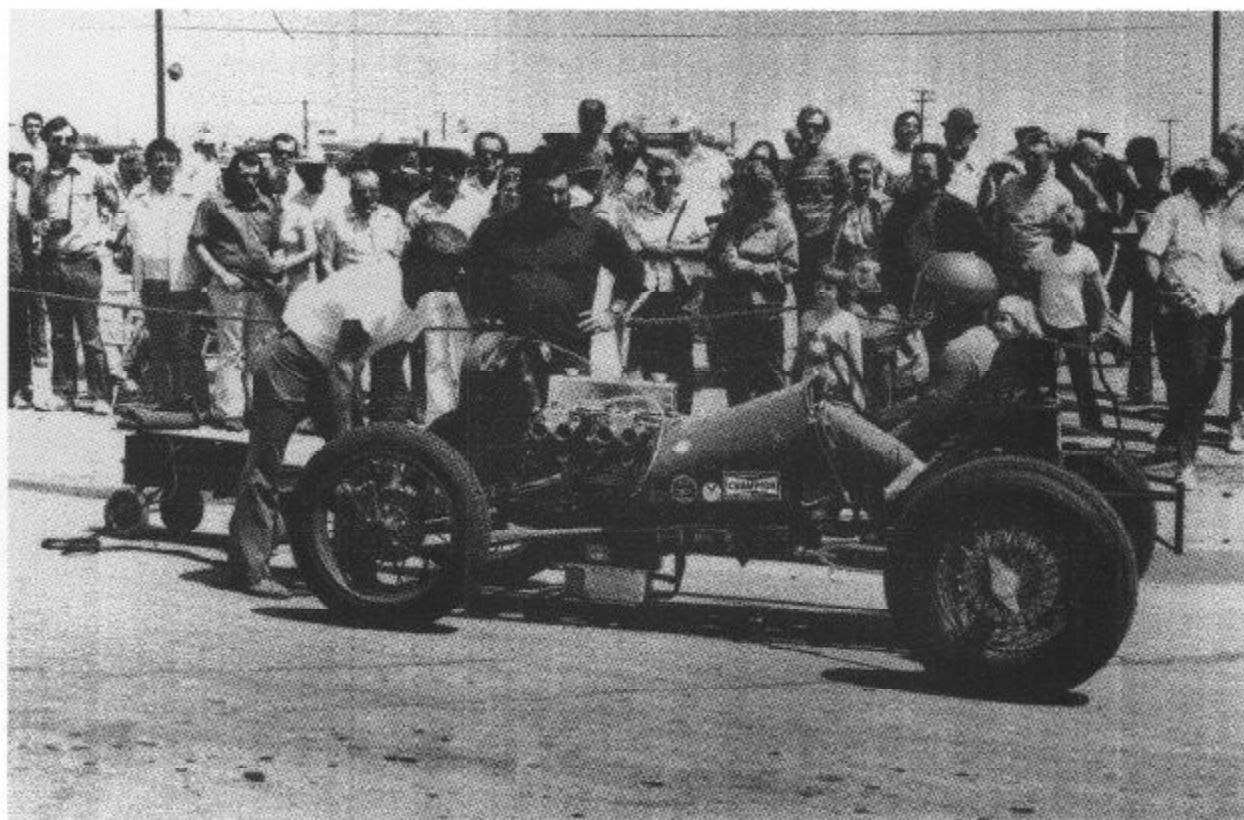
What began as a Sunday outing to see if a T could make it up the hill has developed into one of the major attractions for the speedster enthusiast. Publicity given this Climb (largely through *The Vintage Ford*) has resulted in many similar events across the country, but this, the Shell Hill Climb, remains the granddaddy and largest of them all. The Shell Hill Climb, of course, started out as an event for a standard Model T Ford, and except for an occasional speedster or stock car with a Rajo or Fronty head, there was little in the way of excitement. In 1960, though, a rival club, the Model T Ford Club of Southern California, entered a "race car." Using a built-up Model T engine with a Rajo head, and this mounted near the rear of the frame to give better traction, this car broke the ice. The head, block, chassis and other parts were all donated by the members who

assembled the "Wild Cherry" and it looked like a running disaster.

The radiator had been sitting out in a barnyard for years and the horses had used it for a scratching post; the fins were all worn away. The steering column was a length of water pipe with a wheel on one end and a splice on the other and supported only by a knot hole in the firewall. The driver sat on a simple seat strapped to the rear of the frame over the rear axle. Bad as it looked, and unsafe as it was, it made it over the hill in around eleven seconds, considerably faster than ever before. With this, a new era began at Shell Hill.

Well, records are meant to be broken, and it wasn't long before this one was. And it's never stopped. This year's fastest time was just 7.423 seconds!

The "fast ride" in 1976 belonged to Hank Becker of Garden Grove, California and the pictures shown on these pages were taken from the July-August 1976 issue of the *Vintage Ford*. Hank's purpose-built hill climb car was



With the help of a friend, Hank Becker fires up his purpose built racer

amazing. To be fast, one needed horsepower and light weight. Hank had both. The engine was built by Joe Gemsa, the famed builder of racing engines. The chassis and body were lightened to the extreme. Holes were drilled everywhere. Bruce McCalley commented, "Why, there were so many holes in that car there wasn't enough left to cast a shadow!"

Hank Becker took this carry to numerous hill climbs around the country and walked off with the top award nearly every time. It was also a crowd pleaser at several drag strips in its day.

When rules changed and litigious concerns forced many of the great hill climb events to cease, Hank lost interest and he found other challenges. His car was dismantled and the engine found its way into the Foxy Lady, a dirt track race car. The chassis was hung up on a wall in Hank's garage and forgotten.

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in hill climbs; several have been started again or are experiencing a renewed interest. (Note the ad on page 7 for the Chandler Park Hill Climb in Tulsa in June.)

Kirk Wright of Scottsdale, Arizona was introduced last year to vintage hill climbing in

Phoenix and quickly got the bug. Remembering his friend Hank Becker's prowess of yore in the sport, Kirk visited Hank seeking some sage advice. "It's got to be light!" advised Hank as he pointed to the old chassis and body hanging on the wall of his garage. Well, one thing led to another, and Kirk ended up taking the chassis home with the promise that he would "resurrect" the car for assaults on more hills.

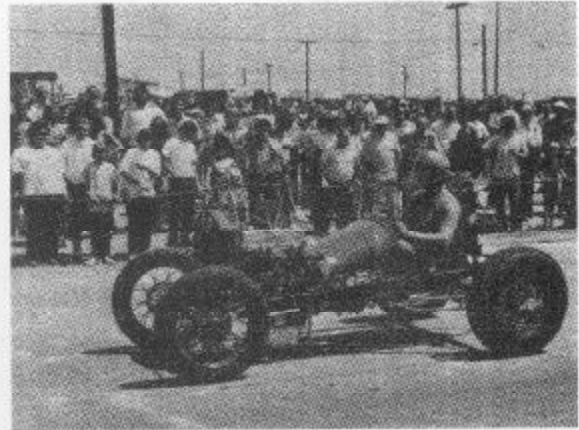
Just for your information, Kirk claims the entire chassis and body weigh a mere 60 pounds!

Kirk doesn't intend to do much to the car—merely make a few changes that Hank suggested to improve it and meet the new rules requirements.

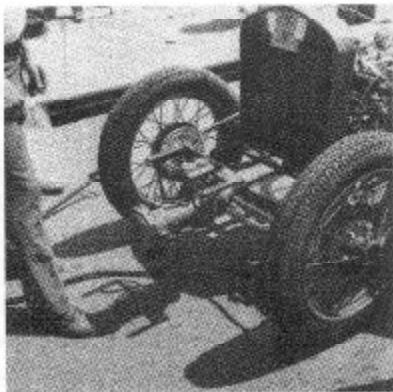
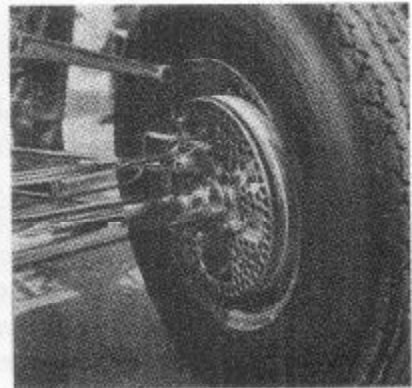
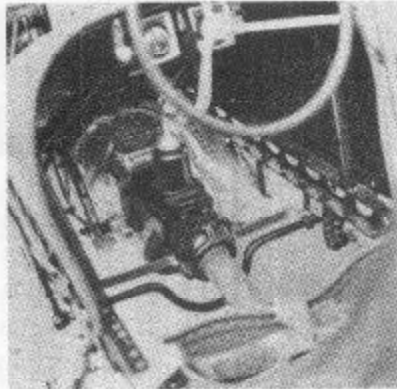
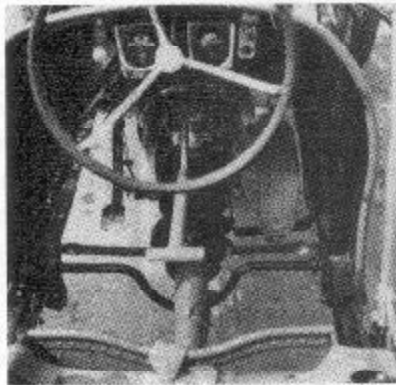
Kirk sent a few pictures to us showing how the car looks today—virtually unchanged from the car shown in the pictures in 1976. Fortunately, this is one famous cars of yesteryear that was saved and will run another day.

For those who think they have a fast hill climb car, watch out if Kirk shows up for an event with this former "King of the Hill" racer. It is sure to be a winner again.

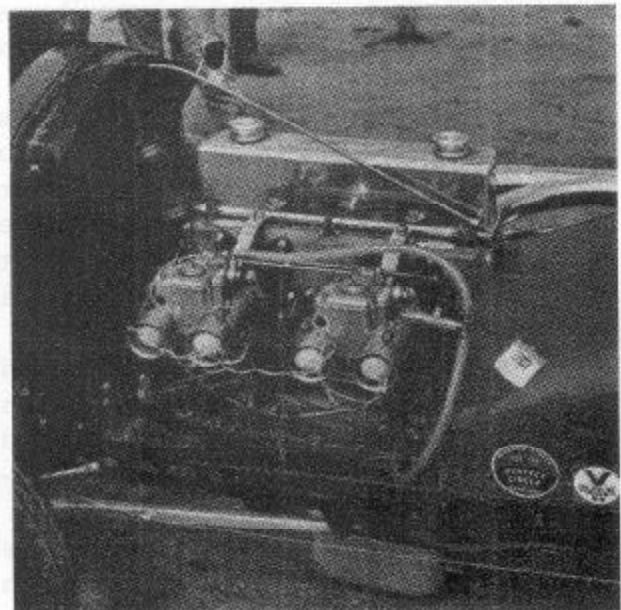
Pictures on this and preceding pages are from the
July-August 1976 (Volume 11 Number 4) issue of the *Vintage Ford*

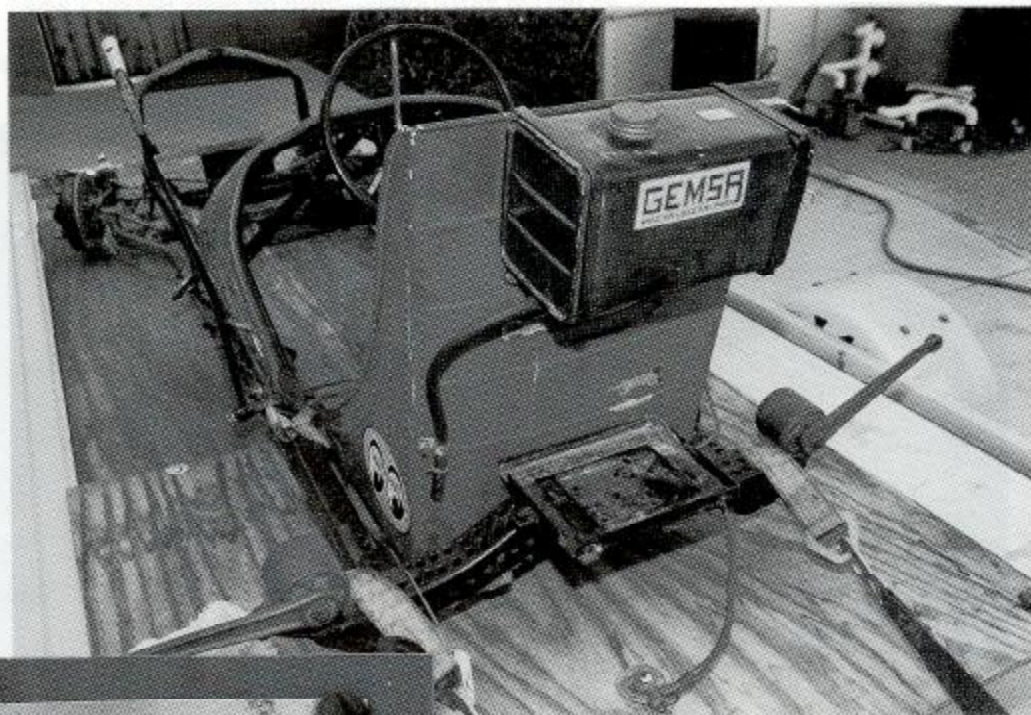


Hank Becker's Gemsa powered speedster. Hill climb rules call for a T block and a T frame in the Unlimited Class and that's about all there is "T" about the car. Note the many holes drilled in the frame, front axle, etc. to cut down the weight.

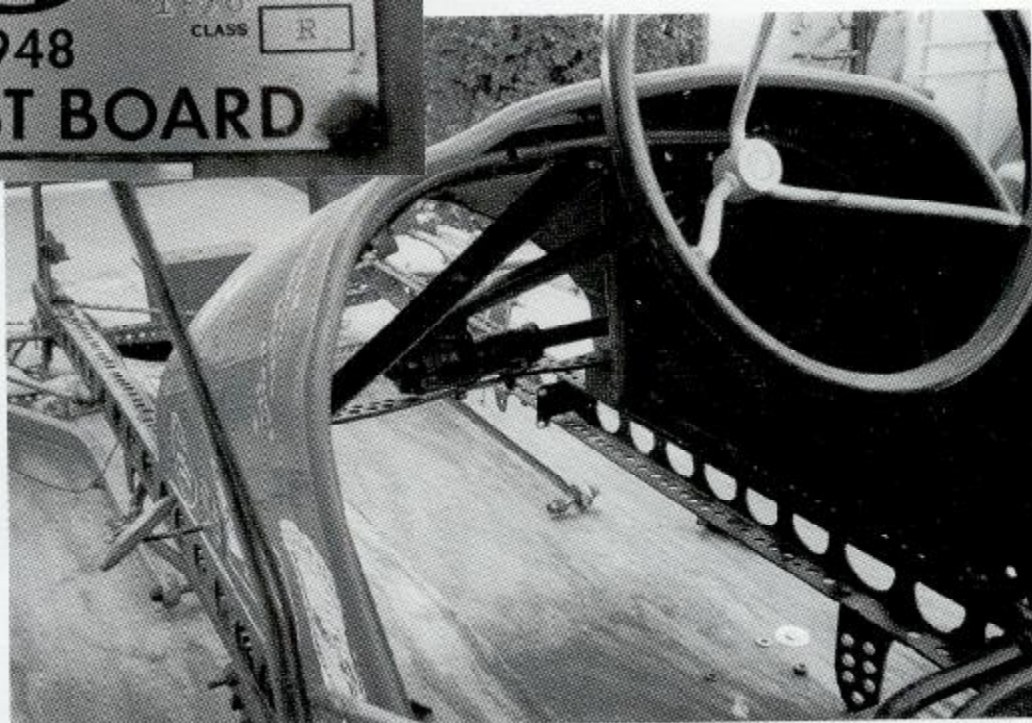


The engine is started with a portable electric starter which is then removed.





REGISTERED RACE CAR			
OWNER			
HANK BECKER			
CAR NAME			
★ BECKER-GEMSA ★			
REGISTRATION NUMBER	1	CUBIC INCH DISPLACEMENT	190
SUPER- CHARGED	NO	AAA KING OF HILL	
PROGRAM NUMBER	7	1948	CLASS R
CONTEST BOARD			



As the car looks today—fresh off Hank Becker's wall

