

## LEGENDARY LOBUCK SPECIAL AND THE NEXT GENERATION

By Ed Archer  
Hayward, California



The original Lobuck Special ascending Mount Hamilton on the first Endurance Run in 1970 with Mike Batteate behind the wheel and Roger Bastien hanging on

For most of us the sheer mention of speedsters and race cars sets the mind in a fantasy mode. Immediately we are Barney Oldfield dicing through the pack of serious race cars, the roar of the engine almost silenced by the cheering crowd as we head for the finish line and eventual win. So it was for my friends Mike Batteate and Roger Bastien back in 1970 when I mentioned this new event that the Santa Clara Valley Model T Ford Club was working on called the 200-mile Cross Country Endurance Run.

I said, "Finally an event for cars like mine, speedsters and race cars only, isn't that cool?" They were only moderately excited until I mentioned, "Why don't you guys build a car to participate? A model T speedster can be easily built for very little money from old available parts and will go pretty fast without any hot speed equipment."

They became ecstatic! (especially after I mentioned that I had an old rusty barnyard "T" chassis setting in my driveway that they could do with what they pleased).

The "Lobuck Special" was born. Their enthusiasm was wild and it's a good thing because it was March 28, 1970 and the date set for the Endurance Run was May 24, 1970.

Neither Mike nor Roger had any previous knowledge of Model Ts other than they liked my race car. Mike had a Model A coupe and Roger's father had a 1926 Whippet coach. That was the extent of their previous old car connections. But both had admired my car and the thought of driving something like that on a run with a bunch of others was the driving force.

I helped convince them to get started by stating, "This thing could be drivable in time for the run." (Notice I didn't say I would help get it drivable, I just said that it could be.)

My help was delivering the rusty chassis and answering questions like, "What hooks onto this arm? There is no starter? Why three pedals? There's only half a brake shoe back here and absolutely no lining! Is the wood okay in these wheels—this spoke isn't quite touching the rim?"

One of the many panic calls I got in the next couple of weeks was the Sunday before the run. "Do you have another wheel? We just got the engine fired up and decided to try our hand at driving the fool thing around the block. On our first left turn the right front end went down and there are wood spokes all over the street."

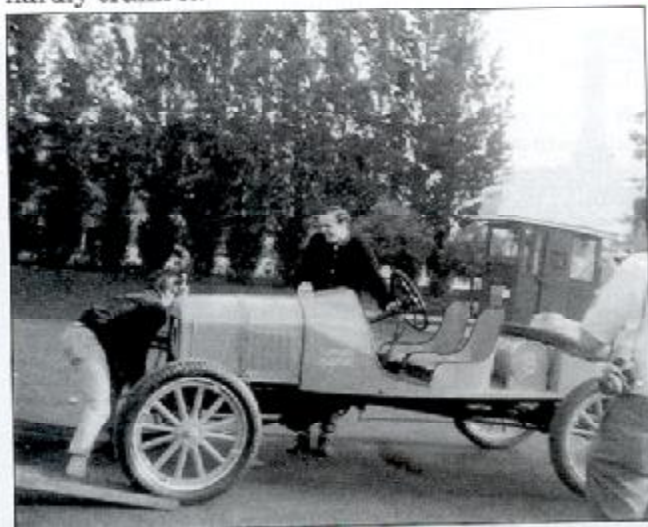
With a better barnyard wheel replacement,

Lobuck went back to the garage for the remaining construction work and complete paint job. The final touch was the proud placement of the entry numbers and most importantly "Lobuck Special" (describing the money they invested) lettered on each side of the cowl.

With paint still tacky, on Saturday afternoon the day before the 200-mile Endurance Run, Roger and Mike were ready to take their first Model T driving lesson. (On their own, no help from me. I was working out final details of the Endurance Run).

The hill going up to Cal State Hayward is the ultimate test. "If we can make it up that hill we're ready" The first try failed and then they realized, gravity feed—need more gas in the tank. With gas and a great deal of help from low pedal they "flew" (Model T owners definition of flew may differ from Webster's Dictionary) over the top and were ready for the Run.

May 24<sup>th</sup> 6:30 A.M., per Roger and Mike, "We got to the gathering area, tried to push Lobuck off the trailer. #/s&~#~! Forgot to leave the brake handle forward last night and it's so stiff, we can hardly crank it.



Mike and Roger in a faded old photo from 1970.

"Forgot to leave the brake handle forward last night and it's so stiff can hardly crank it."

"After cranking, tinkering and pushing for a half hour, Lobuck gave out a puff of smoke and lit up on all four. As we took our pole position at the starting line we looked all around us and saw people lining the streets, racers and speedsters of all colors and descriptions. It was like a shot of adrenaline.

"This was the first of three thrilling moments on this day we would never forget." (The other two were the half way and finish lines.) "As the green flag waved and we left the start, we could hardly keep from giggling and laughing with excitement like a couple of kids."

During the run they passed several cars many times, who would later pass them—as Lobuck's exhaust pipe kept falling off.

It was a good thing Roger was wearing gloves. He could handle the hot pipe and pack nut. "We'd tighten it up and do okay until either it fell off again, or the fuel line would plug up and we'd be off the side of the road for more repairs!"

At one stop, they disassembled the old Holley NH carburetor and reset the float level. Another stop entailed shoving bailing wire through the fuel line.

They also stopped at a gas station and used an air gun to blow back through the fuel line.

Nearing the finish line they heard the sound of a pounding main bearing. "The third and final thrill of the day was seeing that checkered flag being waved in front of us and hearing a rousing cheer go up as we passed by. What a Moment!"

Lobuck, with Mike and Roger at the helm not only finished the Run, but won the "Hard Luck, finishing the Run" award. It was a proud moment for Lobuck, Mike and Roger.

In the next few years Lobuck gained a 2-speed Ruckstell axle, A-C outside brakes and a Delco distributor, and finished four more SCVMTC Endurance Runs before the enthusiasm waned and Lobuck got put out to pasture—literally.

Forward to June 5, 1996, 22 years later, while visiting the "Portagee" to get some paint work done on my racer, (which was in pieces for restoration) "Did you ever go look at that old Model T I was telling you about, sitting in a field behind a house over there off Meekland Avenue?" "Nah...actually I forgot all about it until you just mentioned it. I'll have to drive by and take a look some time."

He mentioned that from what he could see of it through the weeds, it was light green. I knew that Mike used to live over in that area, so that night I looked up Mike's phone number and called. "Hi, Mike here," was the reply. After a little small talk, I asked about the car. "Oh you mean Lobuck? Yeah, I kept meaning to put it inside but just never got around to it. It's funny that you asked. The other day I was thinking I might call you to see if you know someone that would be interested in buying it." I said, "Let me come over and look; I might be interested." (I thought I might clean it up a bit and take it on the SCVMTC Endurance Run on the weekend, since my car wasn't going to be back together in time.)

I drove over the next day. It was bad. The weeds surrounding it were so tall that as we approached, all I could see was the top rim of the steering wheel.

When we got next to poor old Lobuck, I could see all the tires had been flat for a long time. Of course the whole car was badly weathered, had



wood rot and was loaded with spiders and ants.

I wouldn't dare attempt to sit in one of the bucket seats for fear of it falling apart and I'd be picking bugs off of me for the next few days! Jeeze, I hate spiders! I thanked Mike and told him that I'd pass the word that Lobuck was for sale.

Talking to Dan Erceg the next day he said, "Why don't you buy it? I can come over tonight and help work on it. Get John, (John Kent, my son-in-law), to help you bring it home. I think we could get it going for the Run. Maybe John will stay and help."

I said, "You haven't seen this thing. It's been sitting outside and hasn't run for 22 years—it's rough."

Dan interrupted, "Yeah but with the three of us, I think we could do it. It's a Model T, so you know with little effort it will run."

I reminded Dan that it would have to be able to pass tech by 4:30 PM tomorrow in Santa Clara (45 minutes from my place). But, I was beginning to weaken. I can't refuse a challenge. I'll never learn...but that's what makes memories (most of the bad ones turn into good stories later).

I called Mike and said, "I'll be over in a little while with cash, I'll bring my trailer and try to get my son-in-law to help us load it up."

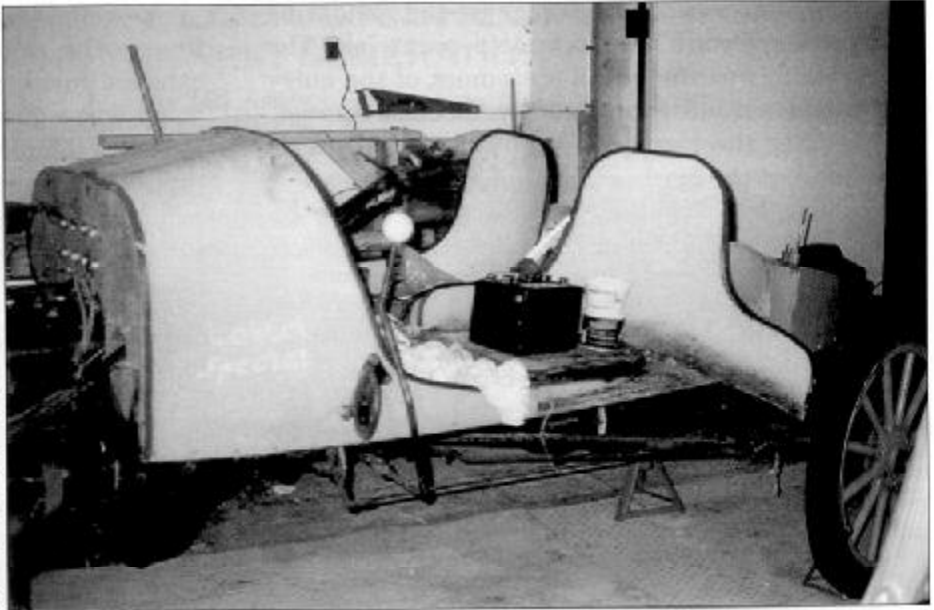
When we arrived, John put a little air in the tires from my air tank and Mike, John and I pushed it out of the field and loaded it onto the trailer.

Our first stop was the two-bit car wash to try and pressure wash all the spiders, ants and beetles off of it. I kept my distance.

I can't detail everything that happened that night as I'd have to make this into a book. However, it was a long one—non-stop, around the clock, no sleep for the three of us, Dan, John and me.

Spiders (some big guys), ants, and beetles kept crawling out from nooks and crannies as work progressed. Tires, tubes, gas tank and fuel system, stuck valves, plugs, hoses, steering wheel, body (plywood) rot, and reinforcing.

As the night/morning/day went on, more problems kept appearing. Sometime during the morning, we lost John. He hadn't planned to stay that long and he had his own car to finish



The left bucket seat side just sprung out during the two-bit car wash/ "extermination" process after Lobuck's twenty-two years of being "put out to pasture."

Lobuck in #4 livery, Dan Erceg and Ed Archer at the finish. Note the rag around the radiator cap to help defuse the soap suds.



prepping for the Run. He could see that Dan and I had a good chance of finishing without him, so he reluctantly (laughingly) said, "See ya! Wish I could stay." Down deep he must have been thinking, "I'm outta here. Those guys are nuts."

Saturday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 3:30 PM. With a new set of toothpicks holding up the old eyelids, we applied our car entry numbers and headed for Santa Clara, arriving just as tech was closing.

The tech crew took pity on us. No...actually laughed at us, but stuck around long enough...and we passed! Whew! What a marathon.

Only 200 miles to go, tomorrow. For now, let's get something to eat, and then a few more last

minute adjustments.

I can't explain how difficult it was to wake up at 5:30 AM the next morning. Knowing the excitement that awaits helps to get a tired body fired up.

The Endurance Run was dynamite. Over Mt. Hamilton in the afternoon east to west—reverse direction of any previous Endurance Runs.

Lobuck's flawless performance was marred only by an eleventh-hour stop for distributor (non stock non Ford item!) problems.

After some tape, bailing wire and then replacement of the old 6-volt coil, (a generous local spectator ran to his backyard and pulled one off an old derelict Chevy and gave it to us), Dan and I were on our way over the mountain and to the finish line. That checkered flag never looked better.

Oh yes, there were a couple of other happenings worth mentioning:

In the morning about one hour out from the halfway line, at a place where others on the run no doubt thought they were in the middle of nowhere, Dan and I happened to have a friend who lived on that road. He was out waving to all the entrants as they drove by, so we stopped to say "Hello."

He asked if we needed anything and Dan said he thought Lobuck could use a little water. Chad said, "Help yourself." Dan went into Chad's shop, grabbed a plastic bottle, filled it up with water and dumped most of it into the radiator.

This was the first time I've ever regretted having a water pump. The plastic jug's previous contents had been a soap concentrate and our radiator cap had no gasket.

For the next hour or so we were drenched in soap suds (churning water pump, leaking radiator cap, etc.). Dan kept wiping off my goggles, then his, and so on.

Also, all day long I kept brushing ants off me. I don't know where they kept coming from but at one time later in the day, when I turned around to look behind me, I noticed the gas tank was covered with them. Fortunately, no spiders!

On the narrow twisty road approaching the top of Hamilton, the outside bucket seat side broke loose (more wood rot) and sprung out. Fortunately, it didn't happen on a

sharp left turn or Dan would have been out on his keester.

Dan spent the descent down the mountain and to the finish line trying to hold on and hold the seat side together at the same time, to keep from falling out (no problem with my gentle driving habits.)

Seeing the checkered flag definitely had extra special meaning for us. Lobuck, Dan and I won some sort of award at the finish line ceremonies. I think the plaque said something about our ability to tighten screws or, I dunno, something about loose screws or something. It's been awhile, I don't remember.

Our mission accomplished, I hated to do it, but Lobuck needed a new home and I needed to get back to finishing the cosmetic restoration of old number 4.

Legendary Lobuck was sold, within minutes after the final wave of the checkered flag, to two young new enthusiasts—Colin and Grant Feichtmeir (brothers). Their first thoughts were to restore the remains and maybe improve a few areas, but due to the thorough deterioration, they decided to really make something of Lobuck.

Scrutinizing old original photographs of speedsters and racing cars, they had some great new (old) ideas and with the help of Dan Erceg number 12 was born.

Colin and Grant represent a new wave of youngsters entering the hobby, who have more interest in the history aspect and what speedsters and race cars really looked and sounded like in their day when new.

They want something like what they had seen in early photographs, and are paying close



Grant and Colin Feichtmeir, this hobby's future, preparing to crank start their #12

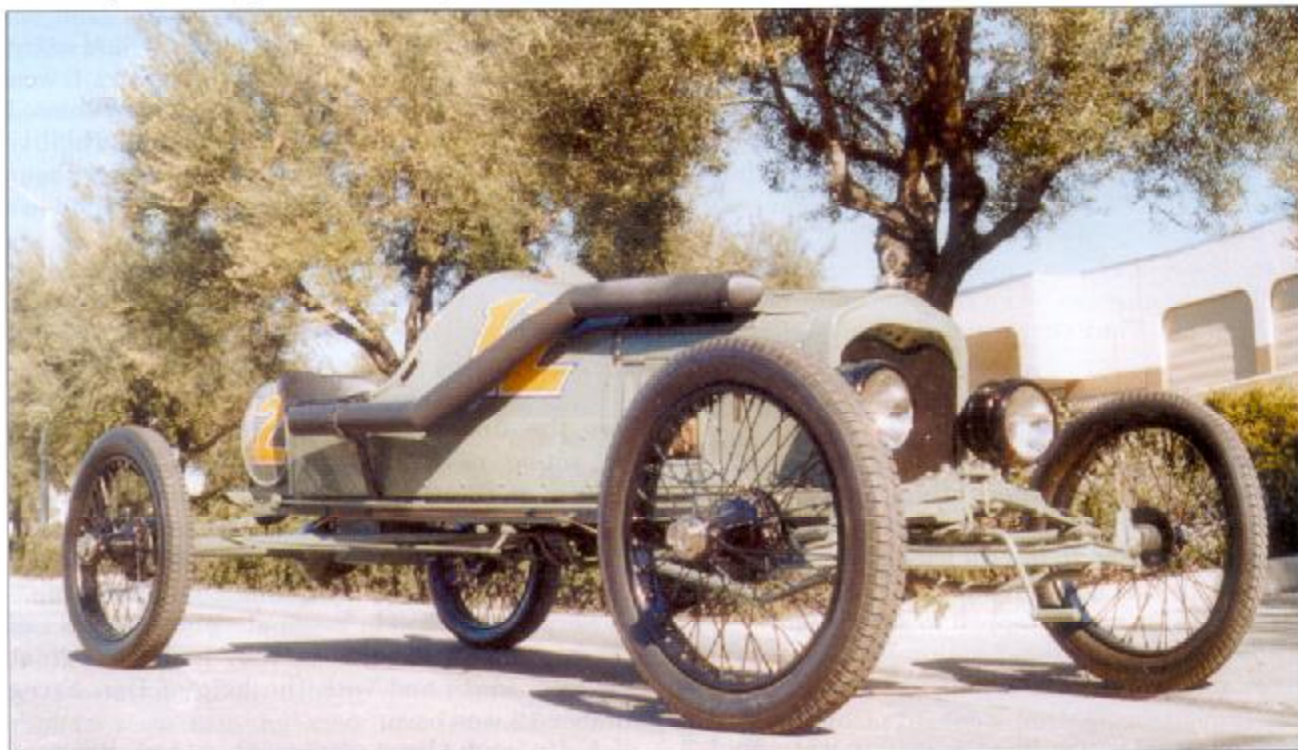


attention to mechanical details as well.

Just look at the pictures. Colin and Grant have been running it on the Santa Clara Valley Endurance Run since 1998 and each year we see some more improvements. In fact, they are currently installing a Frontenac cylinder head to

be ready for this year's Run.

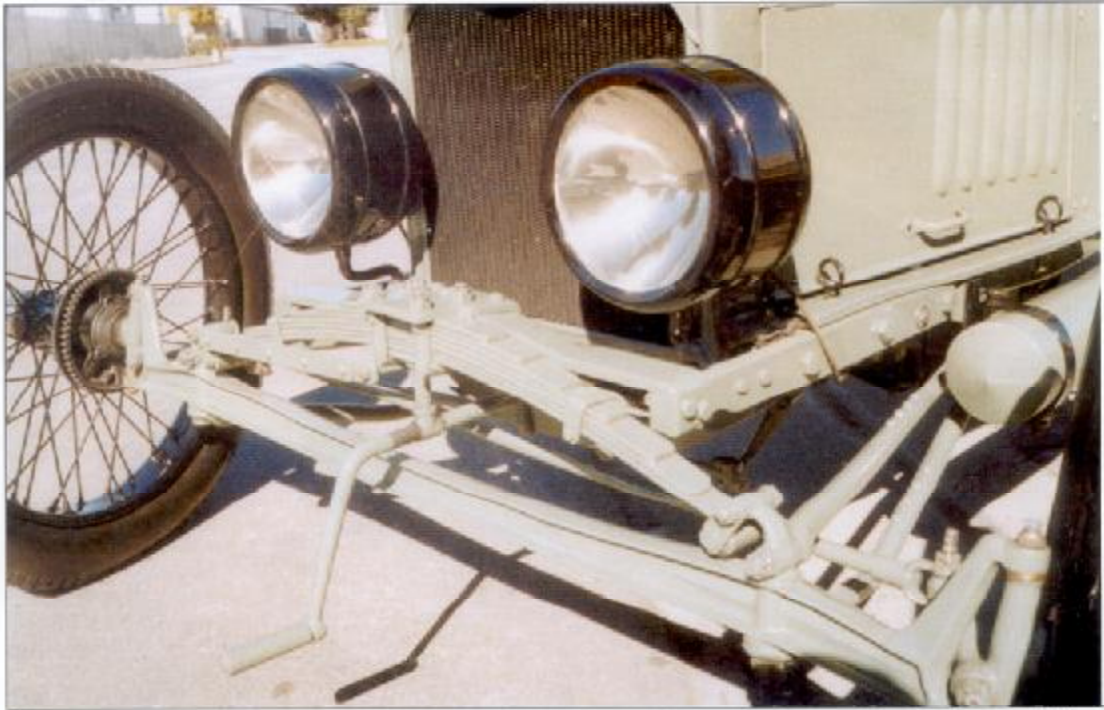
If these pictures aren't enough, come see for yourself. Get a closer look at the Santa Clara Valley Chapter's Endurance Run, June 12 and 13, 2004. □



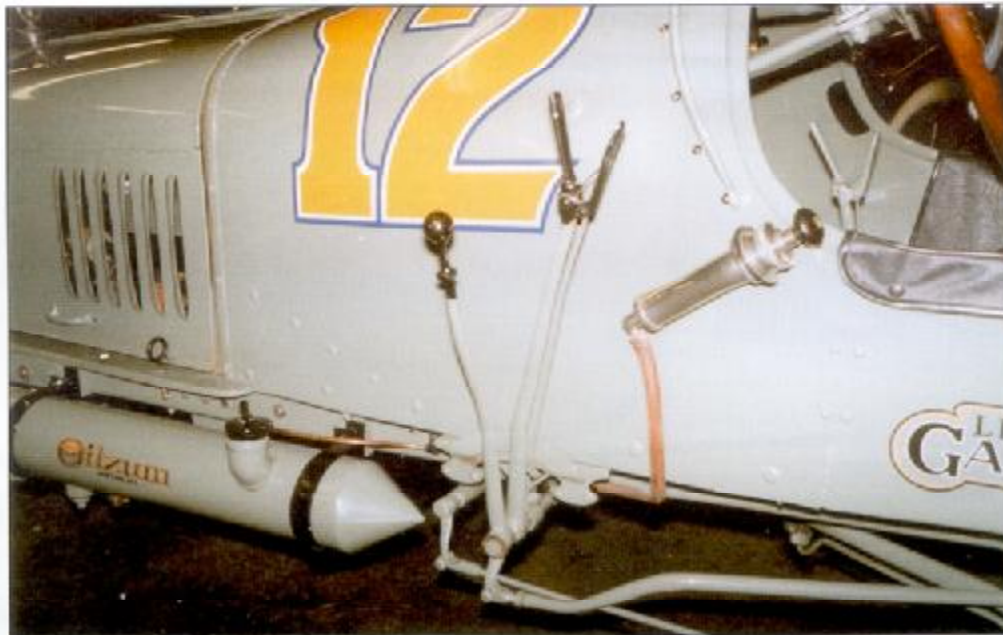
Lobuck—the next generation. Colin and Grant's deluxe creation. Lobuck no more. The Budd 30" x 31/2" wire wheels are the latest addition. Note the unique radiator shell and left side under-body auxiliary oil tank with the Oilzum logo.





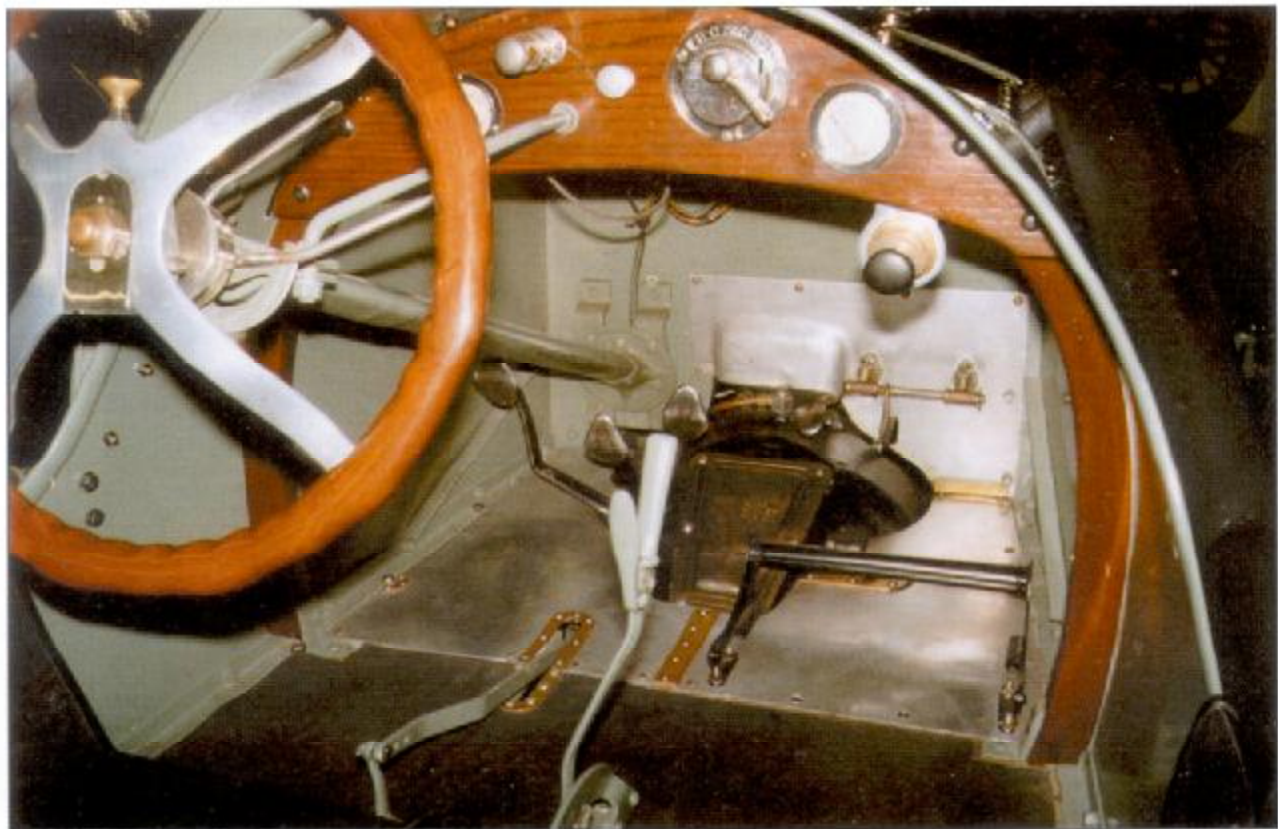


Sturdy hand-made front end lowering bracketry brings the front chassis down a hill six inches. The early style spring perch allows for secure mounting of the split radius rods at the axle. A special brace under the front spring mount at center, holds the extended crank handle aligned and ready to do business. Steady steering device is made up of two flat iron pieces laid on top of each other and riveted together, then as seen here the unit mounts on an added stud at the bottom of the right side U bolt spring mount and extends to the right side spring perch, attaching to the shackle stud end (keeps a swaying chassis, during a turn from affecting the steering). The speedometer gear on the right wheel is missing the accompanying swivel, cable & speedometer head. Large accessory drum headlamps, typical of the era, supply more than adequate lighting.



Closer look at the auxiliary oil tank which supplies extra oil to the crankcase during long races via air pressure system supplied by the nickel-plated hand-operated air pump mounted on the cowl. To increase cockpit space, the emergency brake handle (which operates in conjunction with the brake pedal, the A-C auxiliary rear wheel external contracting brakes) has been moved and the brake handle cross shaft extended so that the brake handle is outside the cowl, and the neat Ruckstell shift lever is mounted on the end of the extended shaft. (Ruckstell rear axle assembly has 3 to 1 gears.)





Starting at the top left to right: Mahogany wood rimmed, aluminum spider "fat man" (tilts down) steering wheel. Stained oak wood dash board, which supports one of the steering column brace rods. A second brace rod end is secured to the left side of the cowl. On the dash is a Weston 30 amp. ammeter gauge. Then a nickel-plated dash lamp, choke knob and Bosch ignition switch, and a Stewart 4-pound air pressure gasoline gauge. A hand pump pressurizes the gas tank. On the firewall is a foot operated accelerator pedal. To the left, the two bent flat iron "shims" necessary for secure mounting of the lowered steering column. On top of the "hogshead" is a magneto plug auxiliary oiler and below that is a "Ford Faithful" inspection cover auxiliary oiler. Both auxiliary oil lines go to the front of the engine to supplement the factory installed inside oil line. The visible brake handle only operates the arm (partially visible to the left) and flat iron connector that moves the clutch into neutral for crank starting (#12 has no electric starter). The horizontal bar to the right is a foot rest for the riding mechanic.

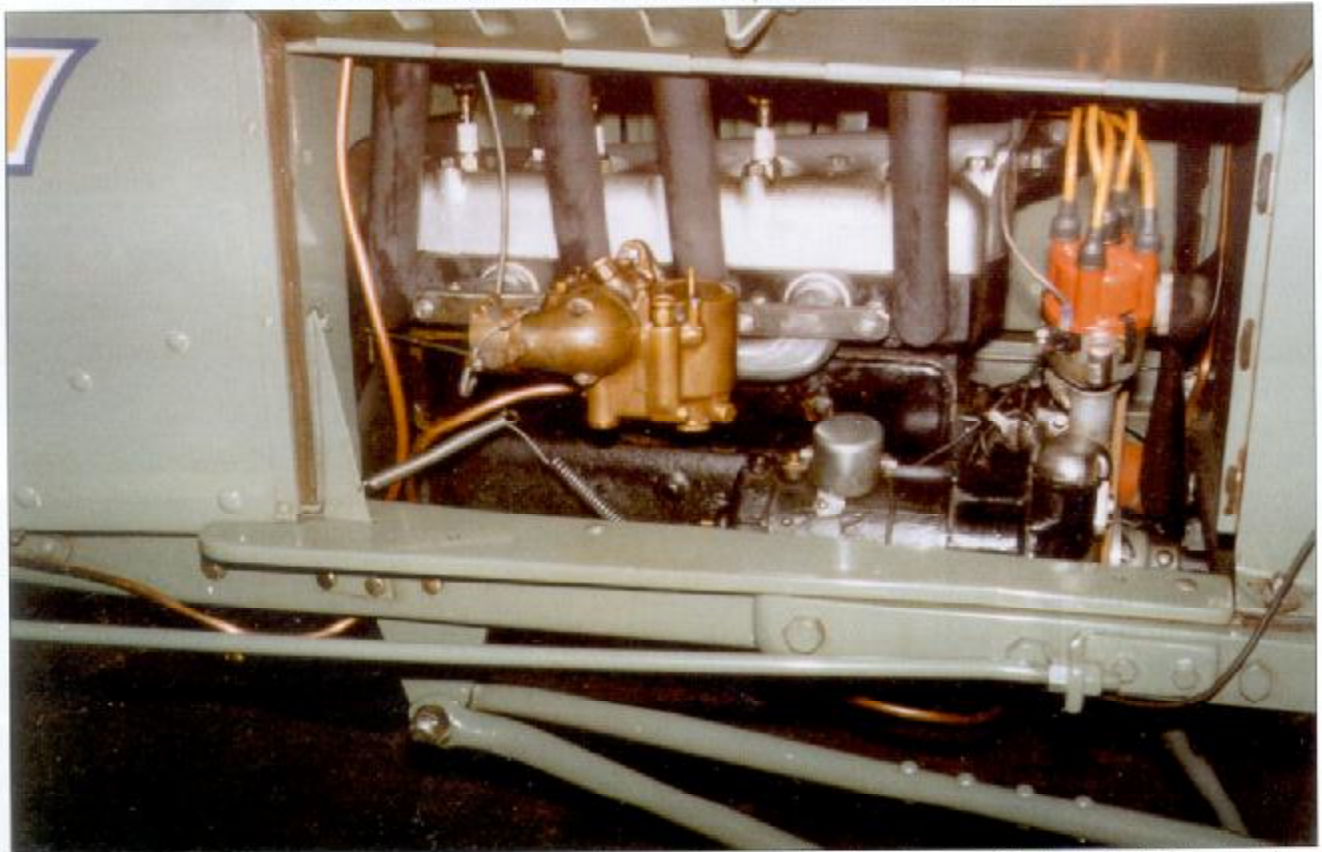


A closer look at the gas tank hardware, frame rail truss rod attachment (right side frame rail stiffening for serious oval track racing) and more of the great detailing on #12, including the PrestoLite battery box. Inside is a 6-volt wet cell battery for lights and ignition.





"Glove fastener" snaps hold upholstery in place as was originally done. Liberty Garage logo—someday I'll write a story on the colorful history of the Liberty Garage. Firmly attached to the left side frame rail between the seat back and gas tank, the iron, string-wrapped grab handle gives the riding mechanic something to hang onto. Gas tank appears to be a modified early Ford Torpedo tank with custom-made iron mounting hardware.



Starting at the bottom: Note the method of lengthening the radius rods by shoving a solid steel shaft into the hollow rod and riveting it in place, (two stock radius rods makes one lengthened rod) and the method of mounting the assembly to the frame. Also visible here is front attachment of the frame rail truss rod. Carburetor is Stromberg side draft Model OS 1, 1-1/4" throat, with a little necessary pre-heat from the two exhaust pipes. Distributor is one of the many modern aftermarket versions; this one has a Volkswagen head. Another new item is the stock Ford-style aluminum head giving 6 to 1 compression. Internal engine details include 0.40 over aluminum pistons, stock T crankshaft with dippers on the rods, and the magnets have been removed from the flywheel; replaced by a single aluminum spool (magnet spacer) every other screw hole. With the lightweight body this combination supplies plenty of power and a top speed of over 70 MPH!