

Open Road Racing on a Depression Era Budget

By Tex Smith

Folks up Montana way do things a little different. Like not getting all het up when Frank put a big 45 hole through Bill's shirt front (with Bill in it) because Bill had been asking for it all along. Or running to the doctor with a little old broken bone from the rodeo; or the Gardiner deputy informing transient hippies they got just twenty minutes to get out of town; or the cowboys over at Bozeman hog-tying a bunch of protesters and giving them a free haircut (to the bone) with sheep shears. Up in the Big Sky Country a man is still a man, and he either proves it or goes under.

That's why Model T racing is so popular. You can go out and spend eighty or a hundred thousand dollars and buy yourself an Indianapolis race car, or half that much to go quick in a quarter-mile drag race. But you better have your beans in the right place if you plan on competing in the annual Montana 500 mile cross-country road race. No big bucks will help here - just the ability to wire a Tin L izzy together and hang on for three days.

I had been cutting some teepee poles back in the Crazies and stopped by Tom's Store in Wilsall for sody pop.

"Been fishing?"

"Nope. Getting out some poles for a \par teepee. Making my own kind of tent for a big pow-wow back in Peoria, Illinois come this August. Lots of hot rods getting together back there."

"Yeah. They're doing that sort of thing now. That bunch of Model T racers are gonna come through here this Thursday."

"But that's only July 2nd. Thought they ran that 50 mile race in conjunction with the Livingston Roundup rodeo on the 4th."

"They do, but this here is the 500 mile race. Moved it up a month this year so the fellers could get a shot at

both races the same week. They start over at the state capitol in Helena on Tuesday and swing down through Bozeman, then east to Laurel for the first night. That's about 250 miles. Then they go up north to Roundup and Grass Range, then back west to White Sulphur Springs for the second night... 'Bout another 230 miles. Come on down to Livingston next day to finish, and they'll be coming right through here."

I had made plans to leave for Los Angeles and its wonderful smog that day, but obviously the big cross-country T race couldn't be ignored. Specially if it was coming right through town - all one block of it, if you count the Co-Op out past Johnny's hardware.

Model T racing got started in Montana as a kind of off-shoot for rodeos. Up in White Sulphur Springs, which is a little town in about the center of the state noted for its "friendly" discussions come Saturday night, someone thought it would be fun to stage a T race with the rodeo. The idea was an immediate success and spread until there are a dozen or so races during the summer. They're all about 50-80 miles long, with prize money in the two figure bracket, plus trophies. The 500 mile race was an outgrowth of this enthusiasm, and is kind of a Henry Ford era Bonneville, National Drags, and Street Rod Nationals thrown into one three-day spree



There are all kinds of obstacles in open road racing, including city traffic. But break a traffic law and the penalty is stiff.



Bob Zornes of Spokane, Washington cut his touring off and fashioned a turtle deck of wood. Roadsters are lighter weight and faster.



Annual Montana cross country Model T race is held on different course each year, but is always about 500 miles long. A number of shorter 50 mile races are held in smaller towns as part of rodeo celebrations, no driver dominates the competition.



Get out and get under if you discover a problem. Since this is an affair for the average fella, ability to tune and nurse engine is paramount.



There are a few rest stops during each of three legs, but only the engine gets to relax. Pit crews are helpful.



Just trying to keep in the race is most of the fun, and it really tests the mettle of drivers. No outside help

while under time.



Valvoline is the choice of champions even when the engine is 43 years old.



Competition comes from everywhere, crank isn't just for appearance.



Don Englmann came from Chicago and found snow in Montana during July, tremendous competition with winners only few minutes apart at finish.

But again, no one is going to get all bent out of shape over the thing. Headquarters of the Montana Cross-Country T Association are at Box 89, Ledger, Montana 59456, in case you'd care to write. So anyway, you just knock the roosting chickens off your racer, check the oil, pour in a gallon of water, and go race. Sometimes you might have to patch a tire, but that's the price you pay for big time. This non-compliance with big-buck racing has made the cross-country high point in the aim of T enthusiasts around the nation. At first it was considered something if someone came to race from a neighboring state. Then Fred Upshaw came up from Los Angeles in the Ford Part's Obsolete car, and a little publicity started things rolling.

This year, there were fewer cars running the race than normal, what with the earlier date and all, but of the

thirty-one entered, seven were out-of-state. Fred was back, and there was Bob Zorne, Dick Bergan, and Grand Lundin from Spokane. Lee Willis came up from Gillette, Wyoming. Raymond Behnke was out from Kewanee, Ill., and Don Englmann won the Long Distance award with a trip from Chicago.

The whole idea about a cross-country T race is to go super quick from one check point to the other. The cars are flagged off at regular intervals, usually with just enough time to see one another in the distance. By leaning into the wind and squeezing the steering wheel, you can maybe urge up to 65-70 from a really well prepared T 4-banger. Down around 50-55 is more likely. But it is a race against each other, and the best of big league tactics are employed. Like drafting that high windshield '22, or riding the slip stream of a convenient truck. Roadsters are prevalent, because they are lighter and faster, but coupes are often cut down. An occasional touring will enter but sedans almost never compete.

There are a number of rest stops along the way. Not for the driver, but for the car. Get out and get under is the creed of any T racer worth his salt, so these breathers are spaced about 100 miles apart and offer excellent time for more oil, more water, new plugs, new timers -anything that will get Uncle Henry to clicking again.

Well. not clicking exactly. Model A's make a cackling sound, and flatheads sort of purr. But a T Model, well, it clucks. And when it is really wound out, the clucking is a stirring sound unmistakable to any hot rodder's ear. It is unlike anything else on the road.

Winner of a cross-country, is he with the least amount of elapsed time. All the little rest stops help the drivers to find how much time has been gained or lost on a leader, and the leader will swap positions several times during the day. Unscheduled timeouts always add to the excitement. Like this year when Fred Upshaw found a piece of Kleenex in his gas tank between Harlowtown and White Sulphur. I waved as we sped by. Attrition also plays an important part in this race. Just trying to keep an engine together for 500 gruelling miles is a miracle. Five racers dropped out the first day, three more the second day, and one the third. Pit crews come along behind with trailers so no one is stranded for indian attacks.

Perhaps the best part of the entire racing program is the spirit of camaraderie and fun which prevails. Ranchers and tourists line the highway at vantage points to see the fun, and communities turn out in force to wave the participants on. If one contestant breaks a part, another loans a new one. Everything is done for the fun of running, which is something drag racing once enjoyed but has seen too little of lately.

So what's all this thrashing between the barrow pits get you. Well, there is the fame and fortune, neither of which is too great. There is either the sunburn or the frostbite, both of which is always great. There is dirt on the face and grease on the coveralls. There is an ulcer from holding the rods in with blind faith and traumatic frustration from a balky timer. There is unbounded joy.

This has just got to be the most everything race run in the United States. Hot rodders gravitate to the affair just to find parts for their pet project. Rich men drive in it for the sheer exhilaration. Poor men drive in it, because they can afford to. Tourists come to see it, because dad can con mom and the kids into a trip through Yellowstone as a sidelight.

While pure good looks has never been a part of the menu, these race cars are looking better. Mike Meuli of Ledger, Montana spruced his machine up this year and won the Best Looking award, and most of the cars were even painted. Bailing wire is still very much in evidence, however, so things look Ok for several years yet.

In the two classes of competition, aluminum and cast iron, winners were close. In aluminum, Frank Iverson of Ledger won with a total elapsed time of 10 hours, 45 minutes, 11 seconds. Dick Bergan of Spokane was second at 10-52-41 and Mike Meuli zipped into third with 11-52-41. Only 47 minutes separated third place from tenth place. Chuck Worthington of Livingston, Montana, picked up a trophy for last place, taking 17 hours and 36 minutes to tour the course.

In the cast iron category, first place went to Livingston's Eddie Hencz at 13-01-04. Perry Mathews of Helena, was second at 13-40-00 and Bill Shipley of Livingston was third at 13-43-34. It just goes to show, you had better get with the program if you expect to win. And to encourage you, here are the rules. While you're building your car, I've got to clean these teepee poles and get ready for another trip to the Shields River Country.

Montana Cross-Country "T" Association, Inc.

General Rules and Regulations

1. Not more than two people allowed per car at any time as a driver or assistant. More than two people can be participants with any one car but no more than two working on it at any one time during the race, including coffee stops. Any relief driver must be a paid-up member of the Association.
2. No outside help allowed while under the clock on road. Driver guilty of either of above will be penalized one hour.
3. Route will be posted and marked as deemed advisable.
4. Last day of race scheduled to end at noon in order to have time for teardown inspection. meeting, etc.
5. Sponsors and advertising optional.
6. Club will furnish braided seal wire, each driver will be expected to put the wire in place so it may be sealed.
7. Drill left hand front head bolt, second or third large pan bolt, and first or second small pan bolt (for inspector's seal).
8. Removal of head or pan will impose a time penalty of one hour unless you are under time clock. Removal of head or pan should be reported to timing officials by anyone knowing of such being done.
9. No replacement of complete engine allowed. Penalty for such is disqualification.
10. Other repairs during time out, no penalty.
11. Disabled cars may be trailered in and will receive slow time plus a ten minute time penalty from last check out point. Please re-port to timing officials as soon as possible.
12. Citation by law will constitute a time penalty of one hour.
13. First three cars placing will be torn down and inspected by five appointed inspectors, with all cars being available for inspection. The decision of the inspectors is final.
14. Any car disqualified, the owner becomes responsible for reassembly.
15. No alcoholic beverages allowed in competing cars. This is a must and anyone guilty of an infraction will be disqualified.

Body and Chassis Requirements

All model "T's" must be stock with the following exceptions:

1. Some type of substantially built box or turtle deck required on roadsters and pickups.
2. Only Model "T" wire, wooden spoke or disc wheels allowed. May use Model A 21 inch wheel.
3. Only 4:40-4:45/21, 30 x 3 or 30 x 3/2 tires are allowed.
4. Rebuilt radiators allowed. Must be built to stock dimensions including tanks and side brackets.
5. Windshields must be stock for year of car, no altering. Must have safety sheet or safety plate glass top and bottom windshields, to be completely closed and sealed for race. No exceptions.
6. Only Model "T" rearend, axles and standard eleventooth pinion and forty tooth ring gear allowed. Bronze thrust washers also allowed. Roller bearings only.
7. Gas tank of not more than ten gallon capacity.
8. Complete set of floor boards required in place.
9. At least 36 inches of 1 1/2-inch exhaust pipe required.
10. Emergency brakes must be in good working condition.
11. Bolts on wishbone at rear of pan must be safety wired.
12. Ruckstell axles must be disconnected while under time.
13. Car must be licensed. either pioneer or regular.

Infraction of any of the above rules will be cause for disqualification.

14. Model "T" type headlights in working order required (sealed beam allowed).
15. Horn of any type in working order required.
16. The name of the owner or driver and his hometown shall be on both the right and left hand sides of the car, in block or script, at least three inches in height, any color, on the car itself or on an attached sign.
17. Rear view mirror of any type required.
18. Padded seat cushions and back rest of any type required.

There will be a fifteen minute time penalty for failure to comply with any of rules 14 through 18.

19. Neoprene seals in rear axle optional.
20. One or more stop lights required.
21. Shock absorbers are optional.

- 22. Re-arching of springs Optional.
- 23. Zerk fittings in place of oil cups are optional.
- 24. Hoods are not required
- 25. Body and paint color optional.

Model "T" engine and transmission assembly must be stock with the following exceptions allowed:

- 1. Reboring of the cylinders not to exceed sixty-thousands oversize.
- 2. No limit on amount of milling of block and/or head.
- 3. Cast iron or aluminum pistons of stock Model "T" type required.
- 4. Full set of piston rings required.
- 5. Stock Model "T" camshaft with no modifications.
- 6. Only standard size valve heads and forty-five degree valves and seats allowed. Use of two piece keepers and valve setting optional.
- 7. No air holes allowed in manifold, must be plugged if present.
- 8. The use of stock aluminum manifold is allowed.
- 9. No grinding of the intake or exhaust manifold or of the ports allowed. Must be stock dimensions which is 1 1/8-inches.
- 10. Chroming of crankshaft is optional.
- 11. No oversize journals or crankshaft allowed.
- 12. No counterbalanced crankshafts allowed.
- 13. Drilling of rod caps and use of dippers optional.
- 14. Type of fourth main is optional.
- 15. All transmission bands must be in working order, bonded type optional.
- 16. Only NH Holley swayback and/or Ford swayback carburetors allowed. No boring of carburetors or of needles and seats allowed. Must be complete including choke butterfly. Carburetors can be interchanged among years. Not more than three qualified carburetors allowed in possession. Carburetor on thread end must be drilled and also drill center head bolt on manifold side for sealing purposes.(Please Note Change) 710 thousandth gauge must not go thru carburetor.
- 17. Gas strainers allowed.
- 18. Only one outside oil line, not more than one-half inch outside diameter allowed, no modification to inside oiling system allowed.

19. Only stock Ford roller type, New-Day, or Anderson flapper type timers allowed. Ball bearing rollers optional.
20. Heat or temperature gauges optional.
21. Design and use of water pump optional.
22. V type belt and pulleys optional.
23. Adjustable lifters are optional.

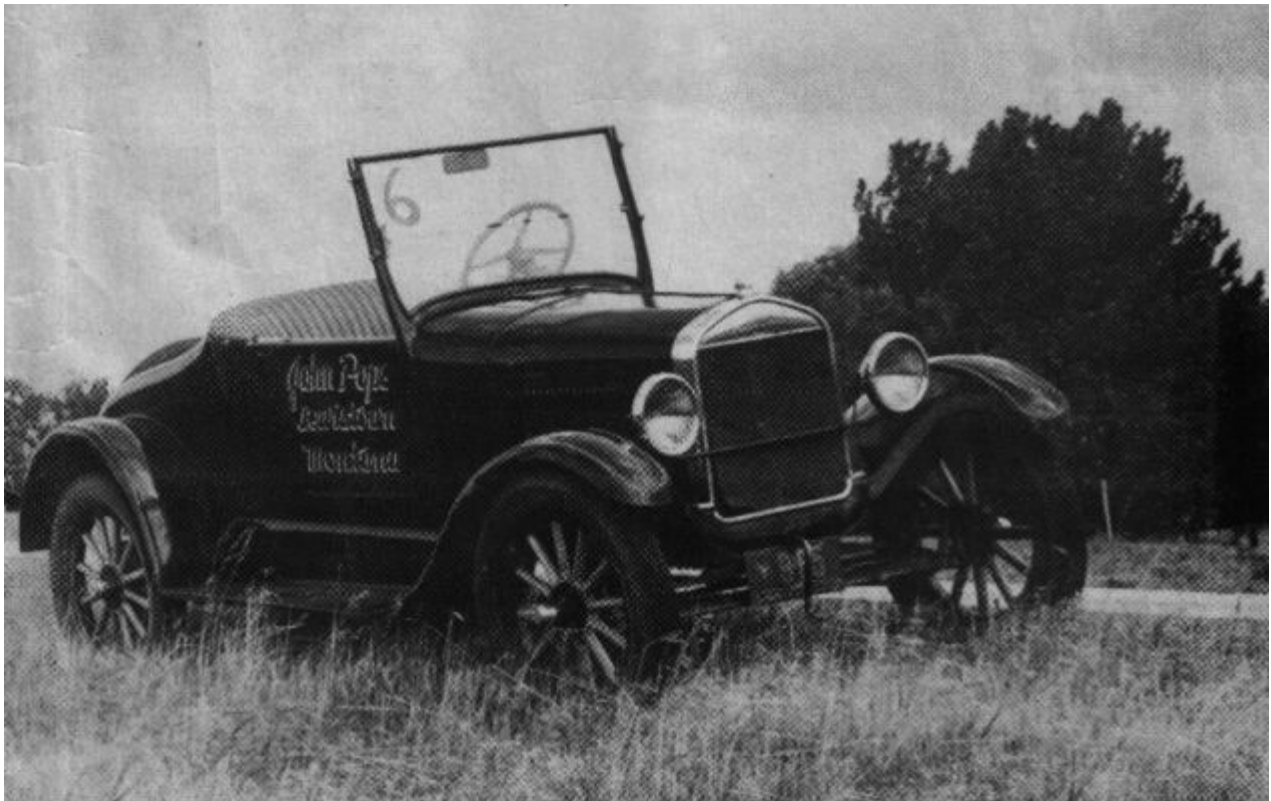
The penalty for infraction of any of the above rules is disqualification. Association is not responsible for accidents.



Of course you can't take things too seriously, even in the heat of a big international race. Passengers are allowed if you need a navigator.



The rules say you gotta have a trunk, and the law says a tail light is required. Common sense says a roll of baling wire should go along.





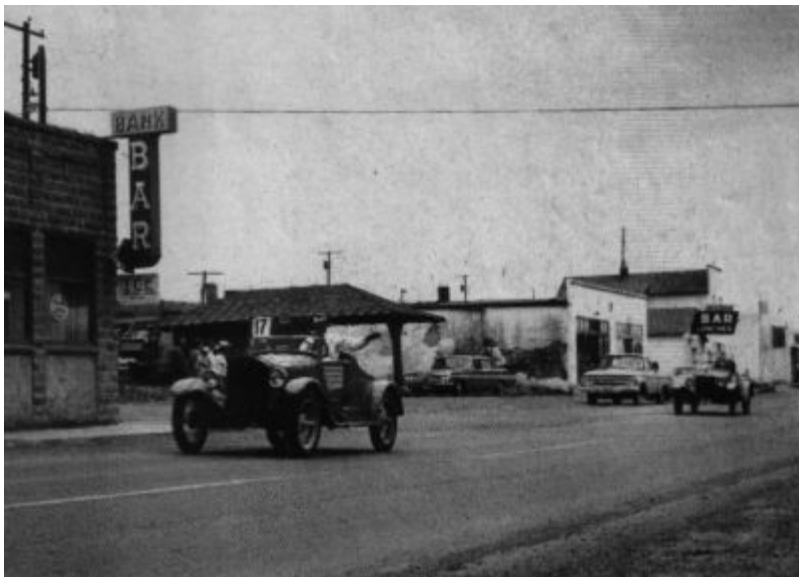
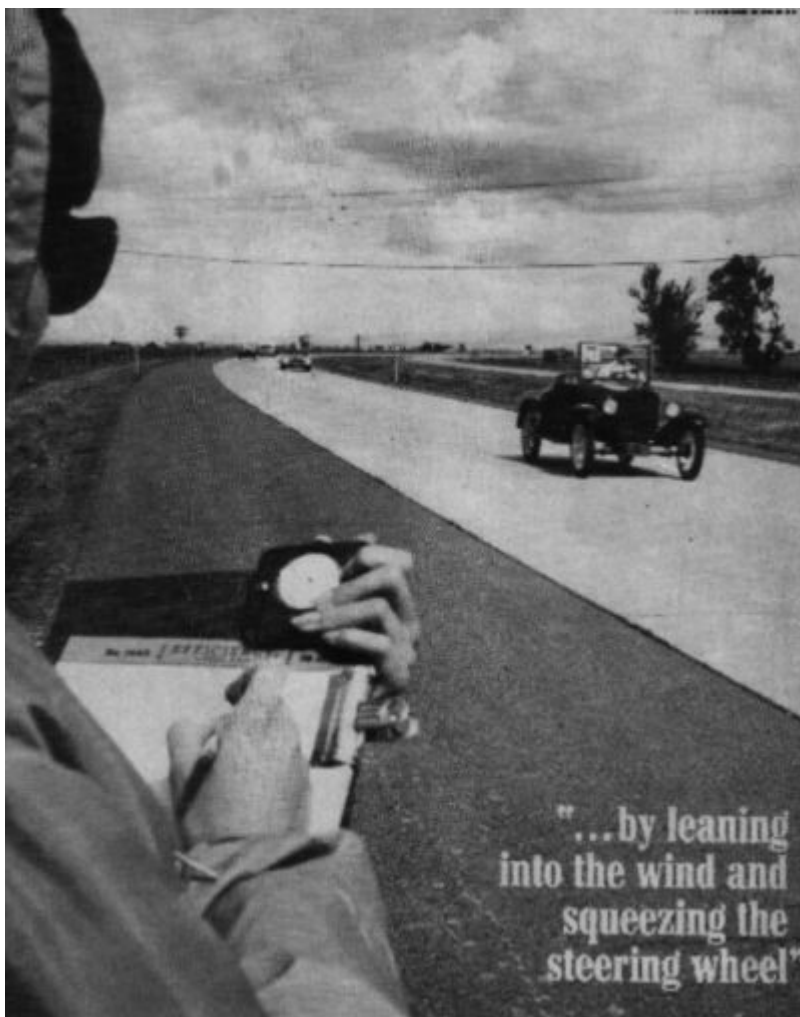
Frank Iverson eventually won the aluminum class, but not without advice of other drivers at rest stops. A few minor coil adjustments, and he's gone.



Iverson takes the green flag after one hour stop at Bozeman. Each leg of journey is just long enough to tire driver and break engine parts.



Extreme concentration marks the eye of any good T handler. It's also nice to have raincoat along for the seasonal unseasonal rain and snow storms.



Eddie Hencz is auto parts salesman during the week, runs his green '27 racer through Wilsall on the last day. Eddie outlasted all others to take first in the cast iron class.