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Did you know HOT ROD made trading cards?

> Our Menu photos this month have little in common other than 1) they were shot in 1962, and 2) they show just how far motorsports have come in the nearly 60 years since they were taken. Le Roi Smith shot “perhaps the fastest gas dragster in the nation,” the Quincy Automotive twin-engine rail (in its pre-Freight Train days) at the California State Championships held at Half Moon Bay. That weekend it logged the highest gas speed of 184.42.
He didn’t build it, nor did he ever own it, but this channeled Deuce will always be known as the “Ricky Nelson” roadster for its TV appearance with the teen heartthrob in the 1950s. Richard Prince shot the photo, while Ken Gross gives us the lowdown on this lowboy on page 24.
What do you consider the best hot rod shows in the country? There’s the Grand National Roadster Show. Autorama, both the Detroit and Sacramento versions. The NSRA Street Rod Nats, for sheer size alone. The Bowling Green and Bakersfield Hot Rod Reunions are in there, though they’re as much about “go” as “show.”

Chances are, a mental checklist of prime hot rod events doesn’t include the Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance, right? And yet, that elite event sent roots throughout this issue of Deluxe.

It started with a story about the 2019 gathering of historic hot rod magazine cover cars on the famed Monterey golf course. But then, the fact that (spoiler alert) the ex-Norm Grabowski Lightnin’ Bug/Kookie Kar T-bucket won the class inspired us to take a “More of the Same” look at the car in its 1950s heyday. During that research, we came across film shot at Santa Ana in 1957, when Norm and Tommy Ivo raced their Ts. In those rolls was an iconic shot of Hill Alcala’s double-zero T that landed in this month’s Where It all Began department.

Proving how small our world can be, Ross Myers, the current (and just third) owner of Norm’s historic bucket, also owned the perfect cover-car candidate for our Star Car–themed issue, the channeled Deuce roadster famously linked to—but never owned by—1950s teen heartthrob Ricky Nelson. It, too, is a Pebble Beach veteran, having won Third in the class in 1997, the first year Pebble’s organizers gave in to the pleas of Bruce Meyer and Ken Gross to include significant hot rods among the classics and exotics displayed in front of The Lodge.

Oh, and while I was in Monterey for the long weekend, I dropped into Dana Mecum’s auction, where several show rods from promoter Blackie Gejeian’s collection were crossing the block, the results of which are in our Roddin’ @ Random department.

It’s not unusual to build several stories from a single trip, especially given how many activities are going on during Monterey car week these days. But, to my earlier point, I don’t know that anyone—myself included—expected Pebble Beach, of all places, to be a rich vein of material for Deluxe. And every other year it wouldn’t be. Literally. The deal Ken and Bruce struck with the Concours was that hot rods would be invited to the show every other year. So they won’t be there again until 2021. That gives Ken two years to come up with a theme and then carefully curate the eight or so cars chosen to represent our rebellious end of the car hobby among the highest of high-end wheeled sculptures on that finely manicured lawn.

Show organizers keep a lid on which cars are invited to the class, so much so that we didn’t know what to expect on the lawn until days before we got there. And that info was leaked to me with the understanding I wouldn’t publish it before the show. So I don’t know how much we’ll be able to tell you about that 2021 gathering before it happens. We do know the Pebble Beach Concours in 2021 will take place August 15, and the cost of admission will likely be from several hundred to several thousand dollars.

Right. On a dollar-per-hot-rod basis, that’s ridiculous. But
look at it this way: You can go to a lot of horse races that aren’t the Kentucky Derby, a lot of car races that aren’t the Indy 500, a lot of football games that aren’t the Super Bowl. Those marquee events are special for a reason, bucket-list-worthy and steeped in heritage that elevate them beyond others of their kind. The hot rods displayed at Pebble Beach in 2021 will be like that: a once-in-a-lifetime assembly of cars you’ve probably only read about, dense with provenance and meticulously finished to such a like-new condition that you’d be sure they just came through the Time Tunnel.

Pebble Beach is not to everyone’s taste, certainly not for everyone’s budget. But given Ken’s track record since 1997, we’re sure the hot rod display will be one you’ll remember for a long time to come.

—DREW HARDIN

“Southern California’s best draggin’ equipment” was on hand for the eighth annual Gold Cup races in June 1959, where a near record crowd turned out to witness the area’s best gas-burners in action.”

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Life—and Hill—at the Drags

"For better or for worse, drag racing events in all parts of the nation have been diligently covered by representatives of Life magazine during the past several months."

With that worried tone, Wally Parks opened a story in the June 1957 HOT ROD, explaining how Time Inc.’s photo-heavy lifestyle magazine was about to bring “worldwide recognition” to the still relatively new (and oft misunderstood) sport of organized drag racing. “Whether or not Life’s presentation is favorable depends entirely on the inclination of the final editors in New York,” he noted, but “hot-rodders everywhere have long looked forward to a fair, unbiased analysis of their sport, the likes of which Life is well equipped to portray.”

Among the races Life’s correspondents visited was the NHRA opener at Santa Ana, the coverage of which Parks used as his setting to prime HRM readers about the mainstream exposure the sport was about to get.

The photos in HOT ROD, by Eric Rickman and Lynn Wineland, made the race look like a lot of other races in NHRA’s early days—that is, except for the presence of Life’s hired helicopter getting aerial action shots. But when the April 29, 1957, issue of Life hit the stands with its story about “The Zoom in Drag Racing,” the Santa Ana meet, like others in the story, was a postcard-perfect portrayal of the image Parks wanted to present: well-turned-out young men in clean coveralls or club jackets, throngs of spectators lining the...
manicured dragstrip, and brightly painted cars moving so fast it was near impossible to keep them in focus or in frame.

Among the ringers who turned out in Santa Ana that day were Norm Grabowski and Tommy Ivo, the originator and the first follower, respectively, of what would become the T-bucket craze. Ivo’s nailhead-powered T won that day, but it was Grabowski who charmed the magazine’s correspondents enough to get big play in the magazine: a large photo of him chomping a burger in his bucket at Bob’s Big Boy (though they did misspell his name as Grabowsky).

A T of an entirely different kind was at Santa Ana, too: Hill Alcala’s red, roundy-round/dry lakes/drag race ’24 T, its famous double-zero racing number sporting eyeballs colored in by none other than Dean Moon. In its heyday, Hill’s T was a high-10-second car running more than 130 mph when on a high load of nitro. Since Santa Ana was gas-only, we’d guess he wasn’t that quick. We don’t know, as results were scarce in Wally’s story.

This Rickman photo is an outtake that didn’t run in HRM. Hill’s car did appear in the Life story, shown speeding away from a Deuce roadster over a caption discussing the safety equipment—rollbars, helmets, goggles—required of the racers.

The Alcala T still looks a lot like it did, and it’s on display at Rick Lorenzen’s new Lions Drag Strip Museum, which you can read about on page 14. —DREW HARDIN
Mecum Auctions’ “Daytime” sale during the jam-packed August car week in Monterey was an eclectic affair, offering everything from pre-war American classics and ’60s and ’70s muscle cars to coachbuilt and exotic European cars. Deals were still being done after the auction ended, but Mecum’s official tally showed nearly $40 million in total sales, with the highest bid of $2.75 million paid for a ’67 Ferrari 275 GTB/4.

The sale’s strength, though, didn’t carry over to the historic hot rods on offer from the estate of premier car show promoter Blackie Gejeian. Several of the cars were former AMBR winners, many offered at no reserve, but most failed to garner bids anywhere near their pre-sale estimates.

The highest bid among the Gejeian cars was $149,600 paid for the Dick Williams roadster, the 1953 AMBR winner that also ran 123 mph at Bonneville before being sold and then modified to follow ’70s street rod trends by another owner. The George Barris–built Emperor, Chuck Krikorian’s 1960 AMBR winner, changed hands for $115,500. It and the Williams car sold for well below the auction company’s $300,000 to $400,000 estimates.

The steal of the collection was the $29,700 paid for a 1917 T-bucket built by Dan Woods for Bill Block in 1972. It had what Gejeian believed was one of the first Jaguar rearends he had seen in a hot rod.

For full auction results, log on to mecum.com.

—DREW HARDIN
Inside Medley’s Creative Mind
This issue’s Parts That Appeal department includes new Christmas-themed T-shirts from Stroker by Medley that feature a Tom Medley illustration of Santa stylin’ in Jim Ewing’s ’34 coupe. The illo was one of several Medley did as Christmas card art for Super Bell Axle Co. Gary Medley sent us all three card illustrations, as well as one of the preliminary sketches of Ewing’s trademark hot rod. “He never threw anything away,” Gary says of his prolific dad.—DH
In his last six months, Jobe taped three sessions with interviewer Cole Coonce (right) and videographer Les Mayhew for a proposed documentary series tentatively titled Go! Fever. This first setting borders the shutdown area of Famoso Raceway, site of the Surfers’ biggest win in March 1966.

TOM JOBE, THE LAST SURFER
AUG. 31, 1940-SEPT. 7, 2019

Tom Jobe’s is the last obituary we expected to publish so soon after seeing the gentle giant at multiple 2019 events. His passing last September, at age 79 hit HOT ROD Deluxe particularly hard. Beyond being a regular reader and booster, Tom served as an uncredited, invaluable historical source for most of this magazine’s existence. His years-long bout with cancer was a well-kept secret outside of close friends.

The last survivor of the mid-’60s Surfers Top Fuel team was a human history book of four- and two-wheeled motorsports. In recent years, he joined the racing historians that TEN archivist Thomas Voehringer gathered for research sessions at the Petersen Publishing Co. photo archive. Reviewing mysterious negatives, Tom repeatedly recognized people, places, and vehicles that might’ve otherwise remained unknown—and, consequently, unpublished—forever. He added inside stories and juicy gossip that only someone who’d walked the walk during Southern California’s golden age possibly could; someone whose brain and long fingers helped construct streamliners and Funny Cars for Mickey Thompson, campaign sports cars (including a handed-down Can-Am McLaren) with ex-Surfers-partner Bob Skinner, create parts for Honda’s factory teams, and consult on more automotive and nonautomotive projects than this master engineer-fabricator ever sought attention for, invariably deflecting credit to respective teammates.

Though he and Skinner reluctantly dissolved the Surfers in late 1966—at which point the costs of keeping up with cash-sponsored professionals ended an independent team’s realistic chances of surviving on purse payouts and match-race earnings—all that anyone asked about was how a couple of broke college kids kept pace for as long as they did, culminating with victory in that final season’s U.S. Fuel & Gas Championships. Jobe obliged them during his final years by taping a series of detailed technical interviews with videographer Bill Pitts that spanned the team’s 1963-1966 existence in 51 enlightening YouTube episodes (search “Surfers drag racing team”). Most recently, during the 2019 March Meet, he described the Surfers’ biggest weekend in separate sessions trackside at Famoso Raceway and at the concurrent Smokers Reunion, which featured Jobe as after-dinner speaker (see YouTube, again). Tom was genuinely amazed when 250 drag racers showed up, drank up, then shut up to listen in churchlike silence to someone last noticed locally 53 Marches ago, heading south on Highway 99 with the big trophy and a bag of cash. A local joked to Jobe that until word of the speaking engagement got around town, all three Surfers were presumed dead.

Six months later, they were. It’s been said that whenever a life is lost, a library burns down. Tom’s library was larger than most, surely as irreplaceable as the Surfers themselves proved to be. Drag racing will never again see the likes of him and Skinner and driver Mike Sorokin, but we’ve got the video library of their time together that Jobe completed while his own time was running out. Indeed, this Surfer who didn’t ride waves and racer who didn’t drive dragsters never, ever lifted: Tom Jobe kept the butterflies WFO right across the finish line, dispensing rare wisdom and humor even while driving out the back door.

—DAVE WALLACE

> Mike Sorokin demonstrates how a load of near-straight nitromethane (with secret additives) punished the biggest Goodyears you could get in 1966. Petersen editors of the era rejected a slightly “soft” and weirdly “ghosted” Pomona pan shot that really grabbed us. Whether intentionally or accidentally, staff photographer Pat Brollier’s lens focused on one of the first effective airfoils ever attached to a dragster. Tom Jobe carved the wing out of wood.
The Regata Storica started in 1489, when the beautiful Caterina Cornaro, wife of the King of Cyprus, renounced her Cypriot throne in favor of Venice. The people of Venice welcomed her with a parade of elaborately-decorated gondolas, in a rainbow of popping colors. Every year since, the spirit of 1489 is recaptured in those world-famous canals when the famous Regata is repeated.

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Some HRD readers will be familiar with the name Rick Lorenzen, as he is a well-known collector of American automobiles. His collection totals more than 80 vehicles, including 35 Willys, from low-mileage survivors and rare Utes from Australia to hot rods and genuine gassers. His fleet resides in a beautifully decorated building that keeps expanding. A newly opened adjacent hall is a dedicated museum with a theme close to our hearts: Lions Drag Strip, the legendary quarter-mile track located near Los Angeles. The venue, recently opened to the public, will undoubtedly impress any enthusiast. Its impeccable décor includes lifelike murals produced over a period of 1½ years by Kenny Youngblood, Yvonne Mecia- lis, and Keith Moreland. The various pieces depict life at Lions back in the day, one of them showing crowds in the grandstands. A wide selection of memorabilia adds to the experience, with glass cases devoted to certain themes (time slips, car club jackets, vintage Moon products, and so on) and famous personalities (Art Chrisman and Mickey Thompson, among others). Visitors will also love the re-creation of the starting line, complete with tire marks, a Christmas Tree, and track tower. The hall houses about 30 cars, either original or faithful reproductions, the majority being on loan to the museum. They include the whole gamut of Lions’ contenders: fuel altereds (Pure Hell and Winged Express for instance), gassers (the Stone, Woods & Cook Swindler 2 Willys), slingshots (how about the twin-engine Freight Train?), Funny Cars (we love the Jeep-bodied Holy Toledo), and more. Want to check it out? The Southern California museum is open by appointment only. Visit thelionsdragstrip.com for further info. It will truly blow your mind.

—STEPHAN SZANTAI
ALTERED STARS: Winged Express, Pure Hell, Pure Heaven II: What a trio of fuel altered roadsters! Having them displayed in a re-created Lions Drag Strip environment is truly the icing on the cake. The décor includes several murals and even skid marks in front of a Christmas Tree set by Tommy Naccarato. Some of the painted signs graced the track before it closed in 1972.

SUPER MOON: Back in the day, Moon campaigned a famous slingshot, which won the A/Dragster Class at the 1962 Winternationals. It now resides in the Don Garlits’ drag racing museum in Florida; this faithful replica came courtesy of the Mooneyes team led by Shige Suganuma. It features a Chevy V8 equipped with a Moon/Potvin crank-mounted supercharger.

OLD BLUE: Tom Jacobson was a local racer who regularly played at Lions with a ’62 Biscayne known as Old Blue. Several nearby companies sponsored the 409/409 coupe, including a Chevy dealership and HP, run by racer Hayden Profitt.

SMOG RAT: The late Boyd Penington posted best performances of 9.00 and 170 mph in the Smog Rat AF/R roadster, based on a small ’32 Bantam body. It competed at every major dragstrip in SoCal, where it set records on both gas and fuel in the 1960s. Like the original, this re-creation runs a supercharged Chrysler Hemi.

SCENE AT THE LIONS DRAG STRIP MUSEUM
Hemi Willys: Under the fiberglass tilt front of the Rieker ’33 Willys—which has been in the Lorenzen Collection for a few years—hides a potent 392ci Hemi.

Wild: First AA/Fuel Altered in the 8s, first in the 7s, first more than 200 mph… Marcellus and Borsch’s Winged Express has truly left its mark on the drag racing world. Wild Willie Borsch had a unique driving style, with his right hand on the steering wheel and his left hand outstretched on the car’s body.

Winning Roadster: Hugh Tucker’s ’28 Chevy was one of the fastest street roadsters during the early-to-mid-’60s. It was first motivated by an Olds V8, followed by a Hemi starting in 1966. Among his accomplishments: running 155 mph in 1965, 9.25 in 1966, and winning five National Championship Eliminator titles. Behind the roadster, notice the two Vegas campaigned by Ken Veney and Pisano & Matsubara.
CRUDE AERO: The Howard Cams Twin Bear (front left), built in 1958, used a piece of plywood as a crude aerodynamic apparatus. Behind the board resided two blown 283ci Chevy engines, first fed by eight Stromberg carbs, and later Hilborn injection. To the right sits the real Stone, Woods & Cook Swindler 2 Willys, in company of the genuine steel front clip worn before adopting fiberglass components.

ORIGINAL MOONS: The 00 1924 Model T has remained in the Alcala family since 1953, though it had been formerly raced in dirt track and dry lake competition. Dubbed “The Original Moon Eyes” due to its 00 number, it managed to blast the quarter-mile in 10.80 seconds on 80-percent nitro back in the 1960s.

WORN HISTORY: As you might expect, the museum exhibits several jackets to die for, a few of them presented by ’50s clubs such as the Long Beach Renegades and Vulcans from Wilmington. The Renegades’ claim to fame is the Long Beach Motorama, held from 1958 until 1960 (and revived briefly in 2010 and 2011).

RIDIN’ THE TRAIN: An employee of Engle Cams for more than two decades, John Peters wowed the crowd with the twin-engine Freight Train, the first rail posting speeds faster than 180, 190, and 200 mph on gas. The renowned dragster received a thorough, ’60s-correct restoration in the early ’90s.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: Under the cool sign from the Circle Drive-In Theatre (originally located in nearby Long Beach), Rick Lorenzen and right hand Rob Marchese set a pair of rail chassis, each representing separate eras. The bare frame is a reproduction of a mid-’60s-to-early-’70s front-engine model, while the one on the left came from an unfinished project dated 1972.

BACK TO JACK: Jack Chrisman had his share of racing fun with this ’29 Model A sedan during the 1950s. It first used a flathead V8 followed by a 331ci Hemi. The Chrisman family got it back in 1998 (after it was in storage for 32 years) and accurately restored it. To the left is the Antique Doll, the first dragster to go faster than 150 mph on gas.
Rick Lorenzen (pictured) owns the ’41 Willys he purchased in 1960 for $65. Still wearing a slightly worn coat of primer, it has not changed since he parked it in 1964!

Numerous glass cases celebrate our high-performance heroes, such as Dean Moon, represented by some of his most well-known products: pedal, tank, camshaft, and Moon disc, of course. To the left, a selection of souvenirs from Reath Automotive, known for being the sponsor of the diminutive Fiat A/Altered campaigned by the Ratican, Jackson, Stearns team.

Burks assembled the 394ci Olds motor. The lowered vehicle also features ’56 Olds Fiesta hubcaps, a popular choice with custom car aficionados to this day.
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When you hear the words “pie-eating contest,” images of pastry-faced contestants giving it their all at church socials and county fairs come to mind. This is a little different. Last year, Meltdown Drags committee members Paul Zielsdorf and “Smokey Moe” Petersen from Vintage Drag Racing 101 decided to stage a pie-eating contest of their own, in a manner of speaking, with the one-day event being held at historic Byron Dragway in Byron, Illinois.

**BULLY**

Rich Meier’s Blacktop Bully ’40 Chevrolet coupe (far lane) won all the marbles in C/Gas, recording a 12.559 at 109.64 mph to defeat Jim Hays’ ’57 Chevrolet Corvette, which clocked a losing 13.284 at 90.33 mph.

**FIRST PIE**

The first car to turn a tire at Uncle Sam’s was Neil Brown’s big-block–powered, flamed ’51 Chevrolet sedan.

“The Meltdown Drags had become such a runaway success that we felt we needed to dial things back a bit and simplify,” Zielsdorf says. “Since the core group of our participants competed on piecrust slicks anyway, and we were so close to the Fourth of July weekend, coming up with a catchy title was a no-brainer.”

As it turned out, the track was already booked for the holiday this year, so the second annual Uncle Sam’s Pie-Eating Contest was held the weekend before.

To show the promoters were serious about “dialing things back,” water burnouts were not permitted. “This is a driver’s event,” Zielsdorf explains. “Just like the old days, it’s strictly a matter of how well a driver can feather the clutch and throttle off the line while controlling tire spin and getting there ahead of the next guy.”

While burnouts were not permitted (until after the final rounds), USPEC-2 participants...
QUALIFYING

On Saturday morning, Uncle Sam’s Pie-Eating Contest entrants made a total of three qualifying runs. Shown is Rich Rymarz of Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin, in his big-block Willys, and Dave Beshta’s Tri-Five Chevrolet gasser.

SMASHING: Early-model Corvettes were in abundance at USPEC-2. This ’62 vintage Vette, aptly named Cherry Smash, was one of the more outrageous examples. The 650hp small-block under the tilt front end sports a vintage Cragar blower. The sign board says the show car has traveled just 324 miles since new.

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FORTIES FIGHT: In a battle of the ’40 Fords, the Zielsdorf family’s ’40 Deluxe, with its mildly warmed-over flathead, was no match for Eric Hendrickson’s ’40 coupe (in the far lane, running SBC power).

LOCAL: Byron’s own Mark Styles served on the USPEC tech crew and brought his ultra-cool, Chevrolet-powered ’30 Model A Tudor.

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ADULT PIE DIVISION

The USPEC-2 pie-eating winner in the Adult Division was Steve Johnson, far left (and close-up after his victory).

MILNER

Mike Johnson’s American Graffiti-style ‘32 Ford coupe takes on Ron Bruder’s Rattling A ‘30 Model A Ford sedan during qualifying. Johnson would later finish in the runner-up spot in the Hot Rod Class to Fin Jensen’s ‘37 Ford sedan.

KIDS EAT

The actual Uncle Sam’s Pie-Eating contests took place right before eliminations at noon. In the juvenile division, 15-year-old Andrew Zielsdorf (far left) took home a ribbon and a fresh apple pie for his efforts.

HOT ROD WINNER

Byron Dragway regular Finn Jensen and his ‘37 Ford Tudor captured the Hot Rod Class with a run of 12.990 at 108.44 mpg over ‘32 Ford pilot Mike Johnson’s losing 13.352 at 103.84.

PRE-CRAZY

Vintage Drag Racing 101's Paul Zielsdorf (left) and “Smokey Moe” Petersen strike a pose during the early morning hours before things get a little crazy.

HOT ROD WINNER

Roddin’ Scene

HAULIN’: Johnny Bucket’s strong running, 302-powered ‘60 Ford Econoline pick-up automatically took the win in D/Gas with a 13.68 at 87.64 when Steve Greerer’s ‘63 “Superbaker” Lark fouled.

SUPER FORD: In spite of having traction problems trying to get all that 427 FE power to the pavement, Mitch Manning’s ‘64 Ford Thunderbolt won Super Stock in convincing style, posting a 12.568 at 119.17 against Mike Rymarz’s ‘64 427 Ford Galaxie, which clocked a losing 12.993 at 112.31.

JIMMY BUG: Mickey Brown debuted his GMC-powered Six Offender Volkswagen altered in fine style at Byron, capturing the Dragster/Altered Class with a 12.678 at 166.82. Sadly, Kevin Broderick’s dragster broke.

PATINA POWER: Stock Eliminator was won by Todd Covell’s ‘51 Chevrolet, recording a 14.450 at 98.72 to Randy Kaiser’s ‘58 Corvette, which clocked a losing 14.861 at 94.88.

SCENE AT UNCLE SAM’S PIE-EATING CONTEST (CONT’D)

NEXT GENERATION: The unofficial sweetheart of Uncle Sam’s Pie-Eating Contest-2 was young Heide Neal, granddaughter of Walls, Massachusetts, Gasser racer Ricky Neal. He parked his blown Anglia that weekend in favor of his GMC-powered nostalgia dragster, known as Lil Sis. And yes, she wants to drive grandpa’s car someday.
Growing up in New England in the 1950s, I saw lots of chopped and channeled coupes and roadsters. That term, “chopped and channeled,” had a nice ring to it. It seemed to me to define a real hot rod, so it’s what I aspired to own. Fred Steele’s purple ‘32 Ford from the Boston area ticked those boxes, as did another memorable lowboy from Los Angeles that had a cameo role on a very popular TV sitcom.

A stock height windshield, in conjunction with a body that’s been channeled the full width of the frame, gives the ex–De Fillipi/La Masa ‘32 roadster a chunky, almost perky appearance. Discrete lakes pipes peek out beneath the framerails, just behind the firewall. In the mid-'50s, the lakes plugs exited (curiously) in front of the rear wheels.

The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet began as a radio show in the ‘40s and segued into television in the ‘50s. Ozzie was your typical salaryman; Harriet was a homemaker; and their two sons, David, the older, and Ricky, four years younger, were cast as all-American boys. The series got a big lift when Ricky (his real name was Eric) became a teen heartthrob. He played guitar and sang, and his natural good looks and decent, if a bit nasal, voice boosted ratings. Ricky’s many rock ‘n’ roll hits, like “Travelin’ Man,” “Poor Little Fool,” and “Be-Bop Baby,” gave the show legs beyond its...
David and Ricky Nelson were hardly car enthusiasts, but hot rod B movies were booming in this era, so it wasn’t long before one of the writers developed a hot rod plot line. There wasn’t time (or interest) to have the brothers build a car, but somehow, a little green roadster made its way into at least one episode of the show. (We didn’t know it was green. TV was black and white in those days.)

Legend has it young Ricky desperately wanted to buy the roadster with some of his TV show and concert earnings. Reportedly, he was making $100,000 annually, but his allowance was restricted, and his frugal dad allegedly refused to give him the money, saying, “No 1932 Ford is worth $3,500.”
Ray’s Roadster

This car’s well-documented history starts in 1951 with Ray De Filippi of Los Angeles. Most West Coast roadsters of the period were highboys, so-called because their bodies rested atop the original frame. Ray dropped his roadster’s body down over the frame and welded it onto the chassis with a new floor pan. The result, called channeling, yielded a dramatically lowered silhouette. If you raced at the dry lakes, this wind-cheating modification bumped you up one racing class.

Ray’s Deuce lowboy featured a bored-and-stroked, 286ci Ford flathead with an Edelbrock dual manifold, rare Harrell high-compression heads, a Winfield SU-1 cam, and Kurten dual-coil ignition. The transmission was a ‘40 Ford column shift fitted with a close-ratio Lincoln Zephyr First and Second gear cluster. Ray sectioned the filled grille shell to match the car’s new proportions then fabricated a new three-piece, louvered hood with a bubble to clear the carbs and “lunchbox latches” to open and close the top portion.

Reversed rear wheels were a pioneering feature, along with attractive, fared-in door hinges. A ‘40 Ford dash was narrowed to fit. The car’s workmanship and its blazing fire-engine red finish were first class, earning Ray a feature in Hop Up magazine in April 1952. This car’s proportions were nearly perfect, something that was very hard to achieve with a channeled car. The three-piece louvered hood was neatly done, and the lusty flathead was all that was needed in that era to provide brisk acceleration.

Ray’s roadster reappeared in Rod & Custom in April 1956, now owned by Tony La Masa (whose name also appears variously as La Mesa and Le Masa). Giving no credit to Ray De Fillipi, unfortunately, this feature implied that tough-looking, cigar-smoking Tony had built the car from scratch. On the contrary, as a starting point he bought a car that was very well done.

For his remake, Tony installed a 277ci John Geraghty–built flathead with a Navarro triple manifold and Navarro heads. The identical Winfield cam was specified, along with a Harman & Collins dual ignition. The car’s steel wheels were changed to Mercury 15-inch (vs. Ray’s Ford 16s). The roadster had been repainted lime green, a scoop was cut in the hood bubble—probably to aid cooling—and new, off-white, rolled-and-pleated Naugahyde upholstery was crafted by Lou Penn. Tony, a founding member of the Los Angeles Roadsters hot rod club, showed his car extensively. Famed hot rod photographer Andy Southard shot it in 1958 at a Long Beach show, in a photo that appears in Southard’s book, Hot Rods of the 1950s.

In August 1960, a small shot of Tony’s roadster appeared on a composite cover of HOT ROD. Inside, a two-page feature showed a smiling, flat-capped Tony with his car, surrounded by show trophies. The engine had been upgraded again, this time to a stock ’56 265 Corvette V8 with a four-barrel carb and polished Vette valve covers. The roadster was extensively but not obtrusively pinstriped.

Interestingly, the HRM feature described the car as “Tony’s Sports-Deuce,” noting that “...Tony La Masa decided it was time to show up the imports and build a real American sports car.” The feature further stated that Tony had spent $4,000 on the car—about the price of a new Corvette.
The La Masa roadster’s best profile (in my opinion) is its side elevation. Low-slung, nicely proportioned, with a level hood top, full-length hood sides, and a sectioned grille, plus steelies with “baldy” caps, it’s a fine example of how nice a channeled car can look.

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> A Corvette mill was a popular swap in the mid-’50s. Flatheads were getting tired (sigh!). A stock Vette put out an easy 200-plus ponies, with utter reliability, and it was less prone to overheating than Henry’s old boiler.

> The roadster’s stock ’56 Corvette engine displaced 265 inches, developed a factory-claimed 210 hp. A three-speed ’39 Ford box with a Zephyr cluster and a ’50 Mercury clutch put power to the pavement.
Pebble Beach

Tony sold the roadster to a Bob Kazyuoshi, who in turn sold it to Bernie Sievers, and then it passed to Don Orosco in July 1997. Don planned to complete another vintage hot rod (the ex–Dick Flint ‘29 Ford) for the inaugural hot rod class at Pebble Beach that year, then he realized the Flint car restoration would take longer than expected. Don purchased the La Masa ‘32 from photographs, sight unseen. When it arrived, he called me (I help curate the Pebble Beach hot rod classes) and asked if he could change his entry to the “Ricky Nelson” roadster. I looked at a selection of photos he overnighted and agreed. When Don took delivery of the ‘32, he realized it was well preserved, but, in his view, not up to Pebble Beach standards.

Don and his talented crew embarked on a major redo of the La Masa roadster with just a three-week deadline before the concours. Despite suffering a UPS strike that held up some work, they replated, repainted, restriped, reupholstered, and refurbished the car in record time. Luckily, the roadster was virtually complete and still very original, so parts chasing was minimal. Don had to cross the picket line at his local UPS depot to rescue some of the critical pieces, but if you know Don, whose tenacity on a racetrack is legendary, you can imagine that not only did he retrieve the critically needed parts but in the process probably made friends with the strikers.

Fortunately, there were plenty of photos of this car for the restorers to follow, so there was no guesswork about details, from color and striping to engine and accessories. The roadster was finished and fired up just hours before the big event. It won a creditable Third Place at Pebble Beach that inaugural year, behind Bruce Meyer’s ex–Doane Spencer ‘32 roadster and Kirk F. White’s ‘32 Ford dry lakes racer, built in 1946 by hot rod pioneer Ray Brown.

Many hot rod restorers choose to bring a car back to the way it was first built. In this case, it was arguably more correct to redo the roadster as it had appeared when Tony rented it out for the Ozzie and Harriet show. The car’s TV appearances, with budding rock ‘n’ roll star Ricky Nelson at the wheel, created a lasting impression that added immeasurably to its value.

After its appearance at the Lodge, the “Ricky Nelson” roadster spent time in Don’s private museum until he decided to consign it to Bonhams & Butterfield, a British auction firm, in August 2003. A few wags criticized this idea, thinking that particular sale was
> Extensive use of white striping, white-painted grille bars, and whitewall tires mark this as a late-'50s rodding exercise. Cycle fender brackets bolt securely to the '48 Lincoln Bendix brake drums. Tight-fitting fenders are very attractive and provide some protection, making you wonder why more people don’t run fenders today. Steering was adapted from a ‘40 Ford.

> Restorer Don Orosco must have had quite a chrome-plating bill: the front axle, front spring, drag link, 50/50 lever shocks, steering arm, brake backing plates, and nerf bars all got the dip...and the results are evident.

> The engine fit was snug, but there was room for a fan.

> The lovely hood scoop ensures a supply of fresh, cool air to the Corvette four-barrel. It was a bubble when the car was first built. Tony, in conjunction with John Geraghty’s shop, grabbed the tin shears and nipped this neat opening.

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Period pearl white Naugahyde interior has traditional “roadster roll” behind the floor-level seat. The white art-deco steering wheel is a ‘40 Ford classic. The ashtrays (a necessity for “smokin’ Tony” La Masa) and glove compartment are all operative. The rearview mirror is from a Jaguar.

Neat, simple nerf bars are replicated front and rear. An inverted accessory license plate light was a common touch in that era. The fuel tank was relocated to the trunk. Classic ’39 teardrops are mounted a scoche low. A filled decklid opens from inside the car; it’s supported with a rod on the left side.

Nerf bars provided reasonable protection but are not common today. They’d save a lot of grief in minor accidents. Simple units like these did not detract from a car’s good looks.

Striping highlights the Ford rearend.

Period pearl white Naugahyde interior has traditional “roadster roll” behind the floor-level seat. The white art-deco steering wheel is a ’40 Ford classic. The ashtrays (a necessity for “smokin’ Tony” La Masa) and glove compartment are all operative. The rearview mirror is from a Jaguar.
Sporting a wiper, cycle fenders, and all necessary lighting, this car was a street-legal driver. Kinda makes you want to hop in and head toward the sunset.

The sectioned ‘40 Ford dash was in this car from its inception in 1951. Stewart-Warner gauges ensure the driver knows what’s happening under the hood.

Although the restoration was a hasty one in terms of actual time, it was done correctly, with refurbished original and/or period pieces. The car was still extremely clean; it was detailed and well presented, and it had been driven very little since its trip over the ramp at Pebble Beach. The crackle of the Corvette V8’s exhaust through twin glasspacks was a delight to the ears when it was fired up for inspection.

The buyers were Pennsylvania hot rod and vintage race car collectors Ross Myers and his lovely and diminutive wife, Beth. “I’ve always loved this car,” Ross said at the time. “It’s on a calendar that I have permanently displayed in my shop. And Beth is a huge Ricky Nelson fan. We thought it would be perfect for our museum (now called 3 Dog Garage).” I think really good vintage hot rod roadsters, cars with lakes racing histories, are in the $150- to $200,000 range,” Ross said at the time. “There are a few of those around, but there’s only one Ricky Nelson roadster. Besides,” he says with a smile, “Beth fits in it perfectly.”

The roadster is in good company in Ross’ 3 Dog Garage in Boyertown, Pennsylvania. He loves historic channeled Deuce roadsters, so this car is displayed with the ex–Paul FitzGerald ’32, the ex–Jack Lenz Golden Rod, and the ex–Fred Steele roadster. Ross also owns the late Pete Henderson’s ’32 (“The car that raced the horse”), the Berardini Brothers’ ’32 roadster, the Spurgeon-Giovanine dry lakes racer, and the Al Dal Porto roadster. And last August, the Ross-owned, ex-Norm Grabowski Kookie Car, restored by Roy Brizio’s shop, won the 2019 historic hot rod class at Pebble Beach.
Tony La Masa’s roadster appeared as part of a multi-image August 1960 HOT ROD cover and in a two-page feature inside. The editors called it a “Sports-Deuce,” stretching the metaphor somewhat, but the low center of gravity probably meant the car cornered nicely, even with bias-plyes and solid axles.

Below: Ignoring the oil spots, check out the cycle fenders on the roadster. California regulated chassis height and headlight height, as much to harass hot-rodders as for safety. The lowest part of the car could not hang below the bottom of the wheel rim. Cycle fenders, often made from ’35-to-’36 Ford spare tire covers, were a neat way to circumvent the fender laws. Rodders attached them to the backing plates with strap iron, like this installation. These shapely fenders look handmade.

How many Nelsons does it take to remove an air cleaner? David Nelson (behind the wheel), Ricky (shotgun), and an unidentified co-star (center) get comfy in Tony La Masa’s ’32 roadster while Tony looks on, a bit skeptically. The roadster’s column shift allowed (cozy) room for a trio of occupants.

In this blurry screen photo, David Nelson poses with a hoodless La Masa roadster. There was money involved with renting your hot rod to the studios, but cars sometimes took a beating when driven by enthusiastic actors.

Right: Tony La Masa shows off the many trophies this well-built, great-appearing car won in L.A.-area shows.
When you channel a car, you lose seat height, and the seat squab has to be reduced considerably, as you can see here. That said, the resulting car height was fashionably low, and that’s what counted. Note the lake pipe protruding discretely in front of the rear wheel.

Eric Rickman’s low-angle shot of Tony in his channeled ’32 was a great way to emphasize the car’s low height and cool stance.
Each August at The Lodge at Pebble Beach, you’ll find row upon row of gleaming Duesenbergs, Delages, Delahayes, Roll-Royces, and more displayed on the meticulously manicured golf greens. It’s not a place where you expect to find hot rods. For 69 years, the posh Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance has catered to high-roller owners and their high-end classics. The snooty, tradition-bound Concours crowd looked down their aquiline noses at rods and customs. Considered mongrelized old Fords with transplanted engines, no matter what their provenance, these stripped-down racers were simply not welcome. For years, a determined group of Pebble Beach regulars, led by Petersen Automotive Museum Founding Board Member Bruce Meyer, campaigned for a historic hot rod class. At long last, for 1997, (the late) Lorin Tryon agreed. As an entrant, Bruce couldn’t select or judge the cars, so I got the assignment, curating that first class (and all subsequent classes) of historic hot rods, usually featured in alternate years. Not surprisingly, the first class-winning car was Bruce’s iconic Doane Spencer ’32 Ford roadster.

Historic hot rods have been a hit on the lawn ever since. The popularity of the class has encouraged collectors nationwide to seek out and restore memorable cars. On the lawn, nestled amidst Bugattis and Bentleys, middle-aged guys and gals can drool over the feisty chop jobs that rang their chimes when they were kids.

This year’s class was Cover Cars. Although young men were racing on the dry lakes to the north and west of Los Angeles as far back as the 1930s, the sport really took off after the publication of HOT ROD magazine. Founded in January 1948 as the vision of 21-year-old Robert Einar “Pete” Petersen, HRM was the first successful monthly totally dedicated to the sport. Modestly self-described as “just a kid from Barstow,” Petersen understood this fast-growing sport was more than a haven for thrill-seeking World War II vets and reckless kids in stripped-down, souped-up old Fords, streaking across the dry lake beds of California’s high desert and racing one another on the streets of Los Angeles.

HOT ROD became an overnight success. Founding it took courage, because, in the 1940s, hot rod was a pejorative term. The Los Angeles Times and the Hearst newspapers vilified what they saw as the speed-crazed kids who raced on local highways. But the formation of the National Hot Rod Association, sanctioned quarter-mile dragstrips, and organized SCTA racing at Bonneville soon made rodding respectable. Later Petersen titles like Rod & Custom and Car Craft competed against still more rodding magazines that sprang up nationwide. The covers soon took on a special significance. Some of the best rods and customs of all time have been cover cars. And to this day, hot rod and custom car owners will practically kill to have a car featured on a magazine cover.

There’s another plus: Historic hot rods sell for serious money today at the auctions. The unrestored Kookie Kar (see below) sold last year at Mecum Auctions for $484,000 and probably cost half as much to restore. The idea that an old hot rod can sell for as much as a primo classic is sweet revenge for all those years we rowdy hot-rodders patiently waited to be recognized.

The Grabowski/Kookie T and Tommy Ivo’s T started the whole T-bucket craze but hadn’t been seen together since the 1950s.
For 2019, Pebble’s Class R for Historic Hot Rod Cover Cars featured cars spanning nearly 50 years. Comprised of trendsetters, technical marvels, and Hollywood B-movie stars, several of these fenderless flyers hadn’t been seen in decades. They all exemplify American auto ingenuity.

Judging these cars was an interesting challenge. No two are alike, and we ask owners to present them the way they were initially built. We don’t discourage original cars, but most of the hot rods on the lawn have been restored. I have judged the class since the beginning, and over the years, we’ve had notables like Ray Brock and Alex Xydias on the judging team. We lost author and former drag racer Don Montgomery earlier this year, so his place was taken by Jay Ward, founder of Billetproof and the Asphalt Invitational and the creative genius behind the on-screen cars at Pixar Studios. Experienced restorer David Grant was the third judge on the team. David worked for Gene Winfield as a kid, wrote Winfield’s biography, and is a noted restorer. I’m the Chief Class Judge. I like to think we’ve got the chops to do this right.

We had our work cut out for us. The cars were all different, like judging apples, pears, and oranges. There’s about 20 minutes to judge each car, using a complex but complete International Chief Judge Advisory Group (ICJAG) form that’s utilized at fine Concours d’Elegance events worldwide. That’s hardly enough time, considering the extensive work that went into many of these cars, but we studied the feature articles in advance, and I had seen them all at shows and shops, so we plunged in. Our standard, as we use with open-wheel race cars, is that the cars had to be presented as close as possible to the way they were when they were on the covers of the respective magazines.

Just before the noon deadline, after studying each car in detail, we had our results. The ex-Norm Grabowski Kookie T and the former Eddie Dye roadster were both 100-point cars. We couldn’t find one flaw. The difference boiled down to three discretionary points we are allowed to award, and we decided the Kookie car—which pretty much established the T-bucket craze and starred in TV shows and movies—was just a bit ahead of the Dye roadster, a car that had had a brief impact before dropping out of sight for decades. It was very close. Bruce Meyer’s ex-Bob Morris Nickel Roadster was Third, and we also awarded it the coveted Dean Bachelor Award, sponsored by Ford Motor Company. As many readers know, Dean was a Renaissance man and a dry lakes/Bonneville racer who was the editor of both *Hop Up* and *Road & Track* (at different times). The award is given to the most significant hot rod present.

It’s safe to say hot rods at Pebble Beach are here to stay. And it’s our hope that the class encourages guys and gals to seek out significant hot rods and customs (what Boyd Coddington liked to call “our ancestor cars”) and bring them to the Concours. I don’t know yet what we’ll present in 2021, but you can be sure they’ll be great cars and worthy of celebration.
1922 Ford “The Kookie Kar” Roadster Pickup

77 Sunset Strip was a very popular TV series in the late ’50s. An actor with the improbable name of Edd Byrnes played a tall, handsome, jive-talking car jockey named Gerald “Kookie” Kookson III, and drove this radically modified, flame-painted Model T roadster.

Boys and girls all over America (I was one of them!) tuned in to watch Kookie vault into the cockpit and peel out with a shriek of rubber and a lusty roar from his car’s staggered four-carb Cadillac V8. Norm Grabowski, who built the car, starred in quite a few hot rod B movies himself. The Kookie T was on the cover of HOT ROD in its first iteration in 1955, and then, in today’s guise, it was on the cover of Car Craft in April 1957, as well as on a full page of Life magazine that same year. Hidden away for 50 years, sold at a Mecum auction, then stripped to the last nut and bolt, it was meticulously restored at Roy Brizio’s shop in South San Francisco. It’s now owned by hot rod collector Ross Myers of Boyertown, Pennsylvania, who told me he was one of those kids who wouldn’t miss an episode of that famous TV show. “When I saw this car come up for sale,” Myers says, “I had to have it.” Unfortunately, the previous owner, the late Jim “Street” Skonzakes, had tarted it up with quad lights, twin blowers, calliope pipes, quad slicks, and a garish Larry Watson paintjob. Roy and his team carefully researched the car, using old photos, and brought it back to its 1955 glory. To top things off, Norm Grabowski’s niece Mary showed up at Pebble, with a photo of herself as a baby, sitting in “Uncle Norm’s” car.

1925 Ford “TV Tommy” Ivo Roadster Pickup

When Tommy Ivo was just a car-crazy L.A. kid growing up, he was totally captivated by powerful Buick nailhead V8s and the radically raked T roadster owned by Norm Grabowski. The story goes that Tommy crept into Norm’s driveway on several occasions to take measurements and check out details on the “Kookie car” so he could build his own version. He was caught, of course, but Norm let him continue. Tommy’s fuel-injected Buick made his T-bucket a top drag racing contender—the two cars raced one another famously at the Santa Ana dragstrip. But Tommy’s Hilborn stack-injected Buford was quicker, even winning the Little Eliminator a few times. That “outhouse” half-moon rear window was considered shocking back in the day. TV Tommy went on to star in numerous movies and parlayed his driving skill into a top-performing career piloting Buick-powered dragsters with up to four engines. Tommy even gave Don Prudhomme his start. Concours attendees got to see these two famous T-buckets reunited after over 60 years. Tommy’s sassy red roadster graced the cover of HRM in August 1957. Longtime owners Jack and Linda Rosen of Rancho Mirage, California, kindly got the car running—after a long stint in the NHRA Museum—for its Pebble Beach appearance.
1929 Ford Model A “Eddie Dye” Roadster

Eddie Dye, a successful San Diego construction contractor, commissioned Gil and Al Ayala, well-known customizers in East Los Angeles, to build a show-winning roadster in 1950. This might have been one of the first fully professionally built hot rods. Much of this lovely car’s painstaking aluminum fabrication was the work of the legendary Whitey Clayton, still acclaimed as one of the best-ever metal craftsmen. With its molded panels, track nose, low stance, and hot Mercury engine, (built by Earl Evans in Whittier), the Eddie Dye roadster was a Hop Up Magazine cover car in 1952 and competed briefly at the dry lakes. Its identity was disguised when a subsequent owner installed a ’32 grille shell and made other changes. Over the years, its key components were separated and made into two different roadsters with few clues as to its origins. Kevin Preciado astutely identified the car (he recognized the inclined front shocks) when Tom Branch owned it, but former lakes racer Jim Fuller still owned the shapely Whitey Clayton track nose. Don Orosco tried to buy the original nose from Fuller—who’d had it on another car—and was even able to borrow it to make a copy, but the key separate pieces remained apart until the present owner managed to do the deal. The Dye roadster has been beautifully restored by Jimmy White and his crew at Circle City Hot Rods, in Orange, California, with all the original pieces reunited. The owner is Thomas Bobowski, from Pompano Beach, Florida.

1927 Ford Ed Roth “The Outlaw” Roadster

Talented pinstriper, skilled fabricator, consummate showman, and occasional clown, Ed “Big Daddy” Roth always marched to the beat of his own zany drum, often in a top hat and tails. He started building conventional hot rods, and then used plaster of Paris, fiberglass, and other unusual car construction materials—and talent like Robert Williams and “Dirty Doug” Kinney—to create four-wheeled flights of fancy that were never equaled. When The Outlaw appeared on the cover of Car Craft in January 1960, it was called the Excaliber (sic), and the editors said it was “futuristic yet traditional.” Some people loved it; I’ll admit I just didn’t get it. It took me years before I began to understand Roth’s artistic approach to hot rodding. Roth’s many feature cars, like the Beatnik Bandit (now in the National Automotive Museum in Reno), challenged onlookers to dig his creative vision. The Outlaw is owned by the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles. It had been donated by an L.A. classic and sports car collector named Bruce Lustman, who scored it at a Barrett-Jackson auction. He couldn’t wait to tell his friend Bruce Meyer, “I bought a hot rod!” Meyer cheerily told Lustman he had a serious piece of hot rod art on his hands and encouraged his friend to donate it to the Petersen and buy a more practical rod.
1932 Ford “The Nickel Car” Roadster

When Bob Morris couldn’t buy the legendary Doane Spencer ’32 Ford roadster, the car that won the first historic hot rod class at Pebble Beach in 1997, he commissioned Don Thelen and an all-star cast of hot rod craftsmen, like Steve Davis, Ron Cowell, Ron Mangus, and Pete Eastwood (to name a few) to build a modern-day version of the Spencer Deuce. Many of the Spencer car’s elegant styling cues were utilized, including a George DuVall-style split windshield, hairpin wishbones, a hand-formed removable hardtop, a rolled rear pan, and Halibrand knock-off magnesium wheels painted in Dow 7 gold. The engine was a full-race Gurney-Weslake Eagle Racing 302ci V8. All the plating was done in brushed nickel, like a 1920s-era race car, hence the car’s nickname. After a Rod & Custom cover appearance in April 1993, at Bruce Meyer’s suggestion, Morris sold it to TV personality Tim Allen. But it really wasn’t streetable, and it had never been dialed in. Allen took it on Mark Morton’s Riverside Reliability Run, and it snarled, backfired, and refused to run smoothly. A frustrated Allen insisted that Bruce Meyer buy it, which he did. Bruce Canepa completely went through the car, detuning the engine, building a larger diameter, much throatier exhaust, and changing the rear wheels for better-looking 18s. Meyer drives the black-painted rims off it now. This modern twin of the Doane Spencer car is a perfect fit in Bruce’s Beverly Hills–based collection.

1932 Ford “Phil Cool/Gil Nickel” Roadster

By the late 1970s, show hot rods were becoming somewhat fantastic, departing from the more traditional-looking cars in a way that alienated many people. So when Phil Cool (love that name!) showed up at the Grand National Roadster Show in Oakland in 1978 with a ’32 Ford highboy, powered by a massive 6-71-supercharged Chevrolet 427, the judges went back to their roots and awarded it the coveted Americas Most Beautiful Roadster 9-foot tall trophy. “Sanity” had returned to the hot rod world. Writing in HRM, the inimitable Gray Baskerville said, “Phil’s flight rig is pure hot rod, the epitome of a fenderless Ford roadster, a mother’s worry, the personification of something that’s bright, hungry-looking, loud, powerful, and very, very fast.” The late Gil Nickel (Far Niente Winery) bought the July 1978 HRM cover car and kept it for years before John Mozart acquired it. Quint Meland, from Soquel, California, owns it now. He showed it in memory of his late wife, Shirley. It’s never been restored. And wouldn’t you know, Phil Cool himself showed up at Pebble to see his old car. Cool said this car “taught me to paint, weld, fabricate, and scrounge.” Quint Meland even drove it on the 70-mile Pebble Beach Tour and received a green ribbon to show for it. He fired it up with uncapped headers, and you could hear it in Salinas.
1932 Ford “Tweety Bird” Roadster

Chopped and channeled, this low-slung roadster was initially built by Jim Govro of Austin, Texas, in the 1950s, and it's still owned by Jim Govro and his wife Evelyn. That's a first for the hot rod class. We've had original owners present on the show field, but we've never had a car that's still owned by the guy who built it. He was just 17 when he started this dual-purpose street and drag racing roadster, and it went from flathead power to a 331ci Caddy. When Jim was 24, it made the August 1959 cover of Rodding & Re-styling with a new Chevy small-block in it at the time. The roadster's bright yellow finish earned this car the name “Tweety Bird” after the popular cartoon character in its era. The magazine said it “...looks like a canary, but it flies like a hawk.” Jim didn't keep his car all those years, but when he had the chance to buy it back, he installed a big Cadillac V8, just as it had been equipped in its heyday. He was assisted in the car's restoration by the generous work of Keith Tardel and his crew at Rex Rod and Chassis in Johnson City, Texas, and several other Texas hot rod shops. I first met Jim at this year's GNRS in Pomona, asked him if he'd bring the car to Pebble, and underscored the invitation when I saw him at the Lone Star Roundup. He was delighted with the warm reception he experienced in Monterey.

1932 Ford “Bob Weinberg” Roadster

Noted racer “Big Bill” Edwards enlisted famed Indy craftsmen Lujie Lesovsky and Emil Diedt to build a radical lakester for Bob Weinberg, who'd campaigned the Indy 500–winning Blue Crown Specials in the 1940s. This sleek roadster has a streamlined, handcrafted alloy body on a modified '32 Ford chassis. For a low silhouette, the supercharger for the full-race flathead V8, fed by a trio of sidedraft Winfield carburetors, is located behind the engine, with a convoluted series of gears, chains, and shafts for the blower drive. It appeared on the Southern California Timing Association (SCTA) Program Cover in October 1948. As a racer, it showed potential, but it repeatedly threw the chains at 5,000 rpm. Over the years, the blower and its complex drive were lost. The roadster is now owned and was completely restored by Matt Jones of Goodrich, Texas. (Matt owns Re-Originals, Inc., a supplier of parts for Italian exotics). Using old photos, taken in the late 1940s by car design guru Strother MacMinn, Jones painstakingly reconstructed and reverse-engineered the blower and its drive system. He didn't quite finish, but I begged him to bring the car, as is, to Pebble, and he was pleased and delighted by the response the car received. People at Pebble were absolutely fascinated with the unique engine and blower drive setup, and Matt is reinvigorated to get the car running once again.
The Lightnin’ Bug/Kookie Kar

NORM! Searching the PPC Photo Archive database for “Grabowski” turns up an interesting assortment of images, most of which feature the famously rubber-faced hot rod builder/actor/musician/wood carver posing with a wide assortment of his four- (and two-) wheeled creations. We’ve run several of these archival finds over the years, including some of the images reprinted here. But the occasion seemed right to revisit Norm and his infamous build. The keystone T-bucket, beautifully restored by Roy Brizio’s South San Francisco shop, won the Historic Hot Rod Cover Cars Class at the 2019 Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance (see page 34).

Roy and the car’s current (and only third) owner, Ross Myers, opted to restore the T to its most famous configuration, as it appeared on TV’s 77 Sunset Strip in the late 1950s. But Grabowski had been tinkering with the car’s various parts since as far back as 1952, and the Lightnin’ Bug, as he called it, landed on the cover of HOT ROD’s October 1955 issue.

Then just 22, Grabowski had “already experienced the thrill of building up several motorcycles, hot rods, and even a Jag coupe,” the magazine wrote. “Then, the desire for something really off-beat—a livin’ bomb, with a head for the road.”

Grabowski’s “hybrid T,” as the magazine called it, was a literal mash-up, its body an amalgamation of the front half of a ’22 Model T touring and a shortened Model A pickup box, all sitting on a much-modified Model A frame. Sections of the frame Grabowski had lopped off the rear were grafted onto the front to help make room for a big, supercharged Cadillac V8. A ’39 Ford transmission with Zephyr gears fed power to a ’41 Ford rearend; up front, a ’37 Ford beam axle and its transverse spring pack were among many components plated to accent the body’s black paintjob.

TV beckoned almost immediately. The Lightnin’ Bug appeared in an episode of Ford Television Theater in 1956 but sustained some damage during filming. While the studio made repairs, Grabowski decided from then on he’d be the car’s only driver when it was on loan, and he added a canvas top to better mask his identity in front of the camera.

At the same time, he made some changes that brought the car to its Kookie configuration. The GMC blower on the Cad mill was swapped for quad Stromberg carburetors, and the exhaust was extensively reworked. The black body was painted a Dodge blue, with flames and pinstripes added by Dean Jeffries, and Tony Nancy stitched a new interior.

Petersen’s photo department chief, Bob D’Olivo, shot the Lightnin’ Bug in June 1955 for the HRM story, and he handled the cameras again in late November 1956 for a Car Craft April 1957 cover feature.

Four months later, Grabowski and his T were among those gathered at the Santa Ana dragstrip for the NHRA season opener, an auspicious occasion on two counts. First, this was the only time Grabowski’s T squared off at the strip against Tommy Ivo in his own modified T—which he had built the year before, after seeing Grabowski’s car and later cribbing some essential build secrets by measuring the T in Grabowski’s driveway.
Also on hand at that Santa Ana race were correspondents from Life magazine, working on what would be a cover story about the growing drag racing phenomenon. Grabowski and the T appeared in a nearly full-page photo in that issue of Life, parked at the Bob's Big Boy.

And then Hollywood came calling again, looking for a cool set of wheels for one Gerald Lloyd “Kookie” Kookson III, the parking valet at a club next to the detective offices at 77 Sunset Strip. Edd Byrnes’ Kookie was a breakout star of the show and so was the T, launching countless imitators and fiberglass Fad T offshoots.

While the show lasted until 1964, Grabowski sold the T in 1959 when Byrnes briefly left over a contract dispute. The buyer was Jim Skonzakes (aka Jim Street), who put it on the show circuit after a Larry Watson repaint and an interior makeover. Skonzakes eventually made even more changes, adding quad slicks, zoomie headers as tall as the windshield, and dual superchargers, before taking the car off the circuit completely and storing it for decades.

The T didn’t reappear until after Skonzakes’ death in late 2017, when it, along with another famous show car from his collection, the Golden Sahara II, was auctioned at Dana Mecum’s 2018 Indianapolis auction. The T sold for $484,000, a testament to its groundbreaking provenance despite still being decorated with Skonzakes’ over-the-top accessories.

At Pebble, we asked Roy Brizio about the difficulty in resurrecting Norm’s T, and he said it wasn’t all that hard because the car was still “so complete.” Plus, with all the media coverage it had over the years, there was plenty of reference material to duplicate what had been changed, right down to mimicking Jeffries’ striping and the wooden skull Norm carved as a shift knob.

We only wish Norm had lived long enough to see his way-out T take its place on the Pebble Beach golf course among the Duesenbergs, Bentleys, and Bugattis. Not exactly his scene, but we think he would have enjoyed himself—and we would have gotten a kick out of seeing his mug once again.
Left: Grabowski topped the Lightnin’ Bug’s ’52 Cadillac mill with a 3-71 GMC supercharger, fed by a four-barrel Cadillac Rochester carburetor on top of a Bandimere manifold. The motor was “relatively stock” from the blower down, said HRM, though Grabowski installed solid lifters and Studebaker rocker arms in the valvetrain.

A year and a half later, the blower was replaced by four Strombergs, and the plated Cadillac valve covers swapped for Offy versions. The headers were replumbed into the “world’s weirdest exhaust system,” said CC. “Each capped header has its own separate pipe leading underneath the car, into a collector, then into a 30-inch Huth glass-packed muffler.”

The Lightnin’ Bug sat almost level, getting a slight rubber rake from its big-and-little tire-and-wheel combo.

A dapper Grabowski sported a jaunty bowler for his HOT ROD shoot but showed up for the CC shots in bare feet!
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Grabowski hung the T’s steering tie rod in front of the crossmember, suicide style, to get it out of the way of the grille. As the story goes, Grabowski at first set up the steering backward—a right turn of the wheel made the car go left, and vice versa. To fix it, he drove it—that way!—to Valley Custom in Burbank, where it was sorted out.

No credit was given for the Lightnin’ Bug’s upholstery, but Tony Nancy did the work for the update. Note the addition of the pinstriping on the dash, and how Grabowski replaced the large die shift knob with a bloody skull he carved out of wood. The dash plaque at right, from the 1955 Oakland Roadster Show, is still on the car.

Grabowski exaggerated the stance for its second go-round with a deeply arched Model A rear spring. Dean Jeffries did the flame job and also pinstriped around the ’54 Buick taillights.
Jim “Street” Skonzakes made some changes to the T to keep it fresh for the show circuit and then parked the car for years. Here’s how it looked when it came out of hiding and crossed the Mecum auction block in 2018.

Wally Parks got this shot of Grabowski and Tommy Ivo about to race at Santa Ana in 1957, the only time the two original T-buckets faced off.

Some 62 years after their Santa Ana face-off, the Grabowski and Ivo Ts were together again on the lawn at Pebble Beach. While the Grabowski car is new to Myers’ collection, Ivo’s T has for years been owned by Jack and Linda Rosen. “Tommy has access to it whenever he wants, of course,” said Linda.
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BACKSTAGE PAST 

PART 10: 1963

WORDS: DAVE WALLACE
PICS: PETERSEN PUBLISHING CO. PHOTO ARCHIVE
RESEARCH HELP: AMERICAN HOT ROD FOUNDATION, BOB D’OLIVO, JOHN HARKLESS & GREG SHARP
BEST YET.

Starting in 1955, employees whose Petersen Publishing Co. duties involved cameras were required to submit a brief description and location for each roll or batch of exposed film turned in for processing. Someone on the small lab staff assigned each roll a file number and transferred the information by hand onto one line of notebook paper inside of a three-ring binder. After that particular strip of film dried, technicians cut it into sections for folding into a number-matching paper sleeve for filing behind locked doors, accessible only to department head Bob D’Olivo and a handful of trusted lab workers. Whoever shot the film got back a numbered proof sheet, only, from which to order prints for publication. Not even editors expected to ever see actual negatives.

Even after Xerox machines became commonplace in Petersen’s early Hollywood buildings, nobody bothered to photocopy the only set of directions to millions of B&W negatives stored since D’Olivo initiated the archiving system with his own film of Palm Springs road racers (including five action shots of a nondescript Porsche entered by an unknown newcomer, name of Dean). Miraculously, the full set of irreplaceable binders survived a disruptive series of corporate buyouts (beginning with Robert E. Petersen’s 1996 sale) and headquarters relocations to serve all of us today—and those who follow—forever, if they’re as lucky as HRD readers. Ironically, the internal thieves who repeatedly raided the storage drawers for a decade after D’Olivo retired recognized the benefit of leaving such handy guidebooks on the shelf for future reference.

Thomas Voehringer, the full-time archivist employed by today’s publishing company, has spent a decade transferring those handwritten film-log entries onto a digital spreadsheet that enables the extensive research required for HRD to give an entire year its due in Backstage Past. Something gets lost, though, in the translation from fountain-pen ink in the individual styles of lab workers—including staff photographers D’Olivo and Pat Brollier, who assisted with processing, drying, and printing between photo shoots. Their handwriting conjures visions of the people, places, and things yet to be revealed during processing. The destinations recorded in 1963’s frayed binder read like a rundown of every gearhead’s fantasy automotive events—and then some; e.g., the year’s very first entry, from January 2, is a single roll Brollier labeled “Pete’s Landslide.” As those 12 negs were among the personal film Mr. Petersen pulled upon leaving, we’re left to wonder about his New Year’s surprise. The same day, Brollier dropped off film from a “Teen Show” at pioneering L.A. rock station KFWB. The next week, those two guys were mingling with Hollywood celebrities and NASCAR drivers at one of Pete’s legendary press parties.

Before the end of January, 1963’s film log had added Tex Smith’s AMBR-winning XR-6 roadster; ’63-model Grand Prix, Valiant, Galaxie XL, Chrysler 300L, Avanti, and Riviera road tests; Hayden Proffitt’s and Roger Penske’s race shops; the Motor Trend-sponsored Riverside 500 stock-car race; Miss 500, Margie McNally (soon to be Mrs. Petersen), posing with the official pace
Try as he might, the would-be thief wrested neither the trophy nor the bills—including two-each $10,000 and $5,000 notes (left row)—from a protective queen at January’s Riverside 500 press party. Margie McNally was the New York model engaged to host Bob Petersen, the founder of event-sponsor Motor Trend magazine and an original investor in Riverside International Raceway. The playful photographer is Pat Brollier, an amateur shutterbug and fulltime barber prior to accepting a life-changing position offered mid-haircut by customer Bob D’Olivo.

When it came to glamorous gal pals, Hugh Hefner had nothing on bachelor Bob Petersen (center). “Pete” greeted actress Jayne Mansfield between the pistol-packing duo hired to keep all $66,245 in currency (equivalent to $551,000 today) in place during January’s press party. The biggest chunk was destined for Dan Gurney, who soon won the first of four straight and five total Motor Trend 500s (1963-1966; 1968).

Celebrity partygoers included one of TV’s biggest stars, literally. The gentle giant who portrayed Hoss Cartwright on Bonanza also campaigned serious SCCA sports cars (with average-sized drivers). None of our usual Hollywood sources recognized the guy lugging the portable tape recorder. “Whoever he is,” cracked D’Olivo, “he should never stand next to Dan Blocker!”
Trophy presentations don’t get any weirder than this, as illustrated by the unposed expressions of crewmembers (right to left) Nye Frank and John Peters, the first owner-builders to top NHRA’s brand-new Top Gas Eliminator; uncredited driver Bob Muravez (head turned), who intentionally shielded his face from officials and photographers throughout the meet; and Bob’s right-sized roommate, Rex Slinkard, “The only guy on the crew who could fit into my jacket and the car.” Muravez wore a leather mask whenever he sat in the seat, and John Peters listed himself as driver on entry forms. Probably nobody with the breakage-plagued local rail anticipated the winner’s-circle challenge met by Slinkard. “Rex really got into it,” Muravez told HRD in 2011. “He might’ve even kissed the trophy girl [Mary Ellen Simon].” After the close call, the real driver adopted the alias of Floyd Lippencott Jr., a real-life college professor who was teaching Steve Gibbs at this time—and who couldn’t have imagined his name would be enshrined in a future International Drag Racing Hall of Fame, class of 2015.
> Chevrolet’s Mark II “mystery motor” was kept mysterious on factory orders by five NASCAR teams throughout a Daytona 500 that marked the engine’s official beginning and effective end. Junior Johnson practiced at 168-plus mph before setting a two-lap record of 163.681, some 10 mph faster than the fastest Chevy in 1962. Rookie Johnny Rutherford bettered that in Smokey Yunick’s car, averaging 165.183. Chevys claimed the first four starting spots and finished One-Two in both 100-mile preliminary dashes. Though Chevrolet had already announced an end to production and distribution of 427 parts in compliance with GM’s just-announced racing ban, HRM Tech Editor Ray Brock and MT photographer D’Olivo were denied their usual garage access until the morning after the race. Their exclusive tech story ran five pages in the May 1963 HRM, yet the only external engine shot published was a frustrating version of this very image, overcropped tightly around the rocker cover and pipes (presumably to conceal background evidence indicting the unnamed car owner—likely Smokey, whose strong opinions about GM’s imminent abdication to FoMoCo were widely quoted elsewhere).

> Yes, older readers of the dearly departed Sports Car Graphic will rightly indict HRD for knowingly republishing a May 1963 action shot among unseen archive treasures. We looked hard for an unpublished outtake among the seven rolls exposed at Chavez Ravine (now called Dodger Stadium) before accepting that nothing screams “1963 L.A.” quite like new Corvettes dueling homegrown Cobras in the midst of the city. Small crowds and hassles with local unions and officials (e.g., health regulations preventing promoters from handing out sandwiches to track officials) ended the experiment after one more event.

> FoMoCo was the first automaker to devote serious resources to young teens not quite of driving age. Barris (right) and racer Ak Miller (left) were both on Dearborn’s payroll this season, accompanying the groundbreaking Ford Custom Car Caravan and partner AMT’s slot-car track to car shows and the earliest “teen fairs.” Joining them in Pomona for the season-opening NHRA-ICCA show was seldom-photographed Don Beebe (in shades), the independent Detroit promoter responsible for selling and executing some of the most-influential programs ever associated with his industry clients (soon to include the three-car ’64 Dodge Chargers exhibition team that spawned Funny Cars).
So much for romantic visions of the dry lakes at daybreak, eh, readers? This neg inexplicably belongs to a roll HRM’s Tex Smith labeled “Las Vegas Drag Racing.” Teammates Dave Babler (left) and Dave Clark (center) took turns in the trailered tank that NHRA historian Greg Sharp recognized from previous lifetimes with Clyde Sturdy and Alex Xydias aboard. AHRF curator Jim Miller added that Clark reached 211 mph this June weekend during SCTA’s El Mirage season opener, but Babler’s troubled return run left intact their existing E/Lakester record of 208 mph. An injected, 258ci Chevy provided punch. Babler, better known for Top Fuel drag racing, died of lung disease last year at age 83.

Beginnings don’t get much humbler than the Cheetah’s. General Motors rush-ordered the car in 1962 to challenge Cobras in SCCA Production racing at whatever cost necessary, only to suddenly cancel all skunkworks programs before the season began. Nonetheless, the brainchild of Bill Thomas (in shades) and designer-racer Don Edmunds (not shown) had evolved into this prototype by the end of March. A freelance photographer named OCEE Ritch grabbed the earliest image we’ve seen while here shooting Thomas’ other discontinued factory project, the IRS-equipped Novas intended for international road and rally racing. In the background is SCG staffer Jerry Titus, who was allowed to track-test both BTRC creations.

Ed Roth’s Swiss-cheese chassis and dual Ford engines sure looked cool, but Mysterion’s chrome-compromised frame repeatedly cracked under the load during transport by second-owner Bob Larivee. The Detroit show promoter routinely purchased and continued touring significant customs following their debut seasons. A March 1964 CC article titled “Travel in Style” showed his 40-foot Promotions, Inc., trailer being loaded with Mysterion, the Li’l’ Coffin, and the Car Craft Dream Rod between winter shows.

Two unpublished rolls from mid-April were entered into PPC’s film log as “Marlene’s Party.” We don’t know the reason for the occasion, nor the guest of honor’s last name. We can confirm that (1) the wandering right hand belongs to HRM Editor Bob Greene; (2) the outstretched pinkie is attached to CC Editor Don Evans; and (3) uncharacteristically smiling Bob D’Olivo (second from right) was feeling no pain.
The successful car shows staged in conjunction with the Winternationals, especially, and the NHRA Nationals, prompted Wally Parks to spin off a member-supported organization operated by his ambitious second wife, the former Barbara Livingston (center). Their fledgling International Car Club Association operated out of its own Glendale office and imitated the formula that got NHRA going in the early 1950s: volunteer event help from member clubs and limitless free publicity—positive to the point of cheerleading—in Petersen magazines reaching millions every month. ICCA further benefitted from organizational and promotional talent on loan from Livingston’s hubby as well as her former employer (as HRM secretary), Bob Petersen. Here at Seattle’s inaugural Custom Auto Fair, she introduced Tex Smith (left) as executive field director, charged with signing up charter clubs and developing nonracing activities. Mrs. Parks soon added another PPC-NHRA veteran, former CC Editor (and future PPC VP) Dick Day, to manage ICCA’s expanding Custom Auto Fair series. The other lady’s staff badge reveals her to be Pat Poage, whose surname is Northwestern royalty: Earl Poage, presumably her husband or brother, raced dragsters; his father, Terrell, formed the Cogs Car Club of Tumwater, Washington.

Little evidence exists of this man at rest—ever. Perhaps Mickey Thompson was praying to stay awake when Bob D’Olivo happened along. M/T must’ve been sleep deprived this May at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, where the rookie owner orchestrated practice and qualifying attempts for five revolutionary, stock-block, mid-engined flyweights—then oversaw the two that made the show. After that pair of dark horses posted respectable finishes of Ninth (with Al Miller) and 23rd (Duane Carter), the disruptive builder was rewarded with the D-A Lubricant Award for Mechanical Achievement from the ultraconservative Indy establishment. Of 67 team owners voting, 59 selected the hot rodder whose lasting innovations include so-called “wide-oval” tires. The 15-incher visible here—basically a cheater slick carved with six straight grooves—and its 12-inch predecessor were developed by Armstrong engineers to Mickey’s specs on behalf of Sears, which paid the freight. Thus did Allstate, of all brands, become only the third domestic tire company to compete at Indy (joining Goodyear, also new this year, and long-exclusive Firestone).

Here’s a mystery only someone in attendance at York U.S. 30 Dragway one weekend in mid-to-late June might explain. (Help, mature Northeastern readers?) Had the negatives revealed themselves prior to Tex Smith’s 2015 death, we would’ve asked him how and why these wound up amongst six rolls otherwise depicting the Pacers Auto AA/Altered roadster in New York State. The Pennsylvania track is closed and appears vacant in wider-angle views. The penetrated Chevy was parked outside the timing tower. Adjoining frames of the top-end racing surface show fresh signs of some circular, pavement-ripping impact and a wide oil slick curving across that lane. The caved fender of the ’57 similarly indicates explosive forces. There’s just gotta be some connection to a clutch (dis)assembly in the dirt, right? We suspect someone asked the trustworthy ex-jet jockey and former NHRA official to gather photographic evidence while working in the region. The Chevy’s spinners, whitewalls, full bumper, and windshield decal from Maryland might indicate some unlucky, out-of-state spectator left his daily driver behind for insurance and/or legal inspection. Only Tex could possibly solve a related mystery: Why are published roadster photos from these rolls credited to someone else (Jack Eaton, Ed’s brother and occasional PPC contributor) in HRM’s March 1965 issue?
Magazine writers are almost never allowed this close to the steering wheel of a real race car, let alone a one-off prototype wearing a handbuilt aluminum body. The late Jerry Titus was so exceptional that Bill Thomas turned him loose in his house car on Riverside’s road course for SCG’s exclusive report—then hired the multitalented Titus as his house driver for 1964.

NHRA’s first national event without flag starters went badly for Don Garlits, whose final-round Indy red light (bottom bulb, far lane) made history as the first electronic Top Eliminator loser. It was also his second-straight runner-up finish with the 413 wedge that sponsor Dodge ordered prepared for gas-only NHRA competition. (“Frank Wiley, head of Dodge public relations, said they didn’t build 392s anymore,” Don explained in a recent email. “He said that again in 1965, when Frank told me to start driving SR-8, the 426 car.”) Automatic winner Bobby Vodnik and Garlits each legged it through the lights for what would’ve been a heck of a race, 8.62/174 to 8.65/177, respectively. West Coast drivers already accustomed to single-amber and instant-green starts especially dreaded the five-amber Drag-Tronics tree developed by Lew Bond (right), the electronics engineer who operated Capitol Raceway Park, for prior testing by NHRA’s Northeastern division director, Ed Eaton (left).

> Barely five months after this beauty consisted of little more than bent chromoly tubing atop a plywood table, Bill Thomas exclusively invited SCG to Riverside for the Cheetah’s second track test. Bob D’Olivo’s low angle emphasizes the all-business, no-compromise proportions of a Corvette-powered sport special created by SoCal hot-rodders and racers. For the November 1963 SCG, designer-builder Don Edmonds explained, “Bill wanted the engine in the back. I wanted it up front. So we compromised and put it in the middle!”
The G.T.O. is simply a LeMans with a special option package at $295 extra,” revealed the January 1964 MT (base price: $3,090). PPC staffers plainly enjoyed taking turns torture-testing the revolutionary midsized car with big-car power. Referring to HRM Tech Editor Ray Brock’s spirited plunge at Riverside Raceway, MT proclaimed the test car “watertight and controllable.” A single, hopelessly overpowered rear tire restricted quarter-mile performance to 15.80s at 93 mph with the standard, 325hp 389 and optional, Hurst-linked four-speed. Two issues later, MT announced racing-adverse GM management would reluctantly grant Chevrolet Division’s request to counter with a Corvette-powered Chevelle.

Ed Roth added “Capitol recording artist” to his resume this year, voicing the part of Mr. Gasser on the first two Capitol albums credited to Mr. Gasser and the Weirdos: “Hot Rod Hootenanny” in September (pictured), then “Rods ‘n Ratfinks” this December. (The follow-up “Surfink!” LP was released in early 1964.) In fact, the nonexistent surf band consisted of top L.A. studio talent such as Glen Campbell, Hal Blaine, Leon Russell, and Darlene Love. Liner notes on all three Roth-illustrated LPs (and respective CD reissues from Sundazed Music) further list “Wrecking Crew” member Steve Douglas on sax, but AHRF director David Steele, a recovering guitar pro, positively ID’d the saxophonist in Capitol’s Studio B as appropriately named Jim Horn. “I know because I worked on a record with Jim in the mid-’90s,” he explained, adding, “Great guy, absolute living legend.”

“Yes, you recognize the scene outside Capitol Records from the other, posed photos Tom Medley captured of the world’s biggest-selling music group (pre-Beatles) this December day. Stroker also likely arranged for the perfect prop for an LP jacket and publicity photos. It must’ve been painful for Sam Conrad to watch band members tromp through his Olds-powered Model A. If we’ve got their IDs straight, the Beach Boys were (from left) Brian Wilson, Carl Wilson (obscured), Mike Love, Dennis Wilson, and Al Jardine.
A special delivery by Tom Medley (leading-right edge of tub) and helpers lubricated the annual company Christmas party. To Bob Petersen’s right in the second shot are Tom Siatos (in glasses), his regular hunting companion and closest friend at work; MT Editor Chuck Nerpel (with camera); and possibly Randy Holt Sr. (far left), Pete’s brother-in-law. Art Director Al Isaacs stands directly behind Siatos. Pat Brollier’s party film was among the last submitted for processing this year, logged into the photo lab on December 26.

Following the example of mentor George Barris, painter-customizer Dean Jeffries photographed the progress of customer projects as fodder for how-to articles published in Petersen monthlies, annuals, and “one-shot” special editions. His own radical custom, the Mantaray, established Jeffries as a top builder. He and tinsmith Jim Burrell hammered out a canopied aluminum skin to cover the 1939-vintage bones of a cast-off Maserati Grand Prix race car. The Weber-carbed 289 was reportedly Carroll Shelby’s reward for Dean’s repeated repainting of the first-and-only Cobra to fool gullible writers while Shelby struggled to ramp up production.

Thomas Voehringer, the only archivist ever assigned to the PPC photo collection, recognized the desk (left) from the set of a national variety show filmed near Petersen’s Hollywood Blvd. headquarters. Greg Sharp ID’d the roadster as R&C Editor Bill Neumann’s channeled ‘31 Model A. In their skit, host Steve Allen (left) and comedian Jerry Van Dyke might’ve been spoofing the hot-rod records then enjoying heavy radio rotation and sales.
Eighty-two-year-old Cal Kennedy was ready to live out his life at home, retired from the daily grind and enjoying his golden years after 55 years in the workforce. “I would tell people I was pretty much locked into my rocking chair,” he says. Well, he was prepared to live the quiet life at home, until Mike “Nick” Nicholas appeared in his life.

Nick grew up in the greater Denver area, born into a world of motorcycles and fast cars. His father, Bob “St. Nick” Nicholas, was a hot rodder who enjoyed sharing what he knew about vintage speed equipment with his son: parts like Ardun OHVs for flatheads, the super-rare Rajo heads for Model T bangers, and the cherished Wayne 12-ports for Chevy inline-sixes, the latter known as the “unicorn” power-adder of inline speed equipment.

When Nick had a family of his own, he decided he needed a project car to share his love of the hobby with his two young boys. So, in 2010, he scored a needy 5-inch-sectioned ’50 Ford, a car he thought was just unique enough to stand out at local car shows.
shows. Left in the trunk by the previous owner was the March 1954 issue of HOT ROD, bearing a similar Shoebox on the cover. Though the Ford was the featured story, there was an article inside that really grabbed Nick’s attention: a recap of the first Hot Rod Hill Climb that took place in nearby Georgetown, Colorado, in the late summer of 1953.

Nick was floored by the discovery, as he had no idea the race ever existed. He was drawn to the article and the history and read it over and over. It was a revelation he carried with him for the next two years, until finally a light bulb went off in his hot-rod-infested head. Why not recreate the event? It was feasible, but first he had to find out everything he could about the original event. “The Hill Climb was run nearly 60 years ago, so I wasn’t expecting much,” he says.

After Nick put out some feelers, fellow traditional hot-rodder Scott McCann of Deluxe Speed Shop told him to contact Duane Helms, a man with knowledge of the local old-time racers. “I ran a few names by him that I had found in the magazine, and one that jumped out was Cal Kennedy,” Duane mentioned that Cal went to breakfast with the Denver Timing Association old-timers every Thursday.

It took a week for Nick and Cal to meet and talk in person, but it turned out to be worth the wait. “He was like a shining star,” Nick says. “He had on new jeans and his best suspenders; he was ready to tell a few stories. He knew I was on his tail for a tale or two.” Cal did not disappoint, weaving yarns of his exploits during the Golden Age of hot-rodding. From that point forward, the two were nearly inseparable, with Nick hanging on Cal’s every word about Denver’s rodding history.
Cal, his racing partner Don Scroggs, and T-33 were there when the 1955 NHRA Drag Safari came to Denver for the July 4-5 race, sponsored by the Denver Timing Association and The Strippers car club. The overall photo of T-33 ran in HOT ROD’s September 1955 issue over a caption that called out the Kennedy & Scroggs class win in B/Modified Roadster at 109.63 mph.

**Cal Can**
Cal Kennedy grew up in North Denver and started looking for a car to call his own after graduating West High School in 1947. “It was about that time I started to fancy a nice ’41 Chevy coupe that was nearby,” Cal says. “My dad drove a Chevy, and I had hitch-hiked once during high school and got a ride in a similar one and liked it a lot.” Soon that Constitution Blue ’41 Deluxe Coupe was Cal’s main mode of transportation.

The next thing to do was get a job, and it was through employment that he would meet his future race partner, Don Scroggs. “I went down to Bell Telephone, as it was hiring. I walked in the door, and Don was standing there. He was the biggest Chevy nut around. He saw my ’41, and we immediately hit it off.”

Don was an experienced hot rod builder and driver and was friendly with some of the car guys in Denver. One friend was Jim McKindley, who was the “big cheese” when it came to the Mile High City’s thriving hot rod culture. Jim, in turn, was friends with Wally Parks, who obviously needs no introduction here. Wally, Jim, and Chuck Kirgan would establish an organized hot rod base in and around the Denver area and form the Denver Timing Association in 1949, of which Cal and Don would become charter members, and Chuck would preside as its first president. It was this connection that would pull Cal and Don deeper into the city’s hot-rodding society.

**Birth of the T-33**
In 1951, Cal and Don decided to build a race car. The guys had bonded over their love of Chevrolets and had made a solemn pledge to never go Ford. So they were on the lookout for a usable Chevy to build as their hot rod. Having little money to start with, they went with what they could afford and picked up a neighbor’s ’36 Chevy truck for $15. “We stripped it down to just the cab and frame and put my ’41’s hot inline-six in it,” Cal says.

They raced this combination a few times before realizing they needed more: more power and more engineering. They also recognized they needed a sleek body to cut air and make speed, so they located a derelict ’34 Chevy body to replace the hefty truck cab.
The recreation started as a ‘34 Chevy coupe with the top removed. It’s fit on a ‘36 Chevy truck frame and set back approximately 24 inches as the class rules allowed. To make up for the setback, they removed 2 feet of metal from the quarter panels, which helped fit the body to the frame.

The ’34-based Chevy roadster was brought back to life by Nick, Cal, and a crew of good friends. The hot rod was built under Cal’s scrutinizing eyes, to the specs of the original. It’s powered by the original Wayne 12-port Chevy motor, which Cal had the wherewithal to save after he left his racing days behind. Here, Cal and Nick work on the T-33 in Nick’s Hot Rod Garage just days before the start of the 2014 Hot Rod Hill Climb.

The price? Just five measly bucks. Fitting it onto the truck frame would take some work, as the class they were going to run in allowed for a 25-percent engine setback, and that was something they wanted to take advantage of.

“We set the body on the chassis with the firewall in place. Then we cut it in half and slid the back forward so the rear tires fit into the wheelwells,” Cal says. This procedure removed nearly 2 feet from the roadster’s rear quarters. “I then proceeded to screw up all the bodywork,” he laughs. Once painted its deep Constitution Blue, the car received its T-33 callout on the sides. “We took the ‘T’ from D.T.A., and we used Don’s D.T.A. member number, which was 33,” Cal explains. From the start, the roadster impressed the competition, as the boys picked up speed in the quarter-mile with each track experience. However, their big break was about to happen.

> Working on the T-33 recreation, Dave Scroggs looks a lot like the photo Rickman shot of his father, Don, tending to the original in 1955.
The powerplant starts with a '48 Chevy 235ci engine block, bored to 248ci and built up with a Spaulding C-290 race cam and a race-ready 14:1 compression ratio. A Vertex Scintilla magneto gets the spark out. Three Strombergs feed this sinister straight-six. Lastly, the original headers built back in 1953 get rid of the spent gases.

Nick believes Cal’s Wayne motor likely would have sat in his crawlspace forever. “The inspiration and opportunity to bring T-33 back to life for Cal, Dave Scroggs, and the local Bow Tie ‘scoffers’ was too much to pass up,” Nick says.
Wayne World

In late 1952, the boys got wind of a crashed race car being sold out of Kansas. This was no ordinary race car; it was owned by the legendary Ricketts Brothers, Cloyd and Emmett, who owned Ricketts Chevrolet out of Winona, Kansas. “We found out it was equipped with a Wayne 12-port Chevy inline-six, which was what we wanted,” Cal says. “We paid $400 for the junk race car. That amount of money set us back for quite a while.” But he knew that engine was worth the price of admission. “Back then, they were known as Ardun killers.”

Behind the powerful Wayne 12-port, a ’40 Chevy ½-ton top-shift transmission and matching rear axle were added to help spin the chunky bias-ply tires, while custom headers were fit to finish off the powertrain.

“We finished the car in early 1954, and the first place we took it was a car show at the Denver University field house where we won Best in Show—even with my lousy bodywork,” Cal says. But showing the T-33 was not what they built the car for. They were eager to race. The roadster was an immediate success. The Wayne motor used some of the most advanced engineering of the day and proved its worth on the strip.

When the guys got wind of the Hot Rod Hill Climb being held in nearby Georgetown, they jumped at the opportunity to test the T-33 against the twists and turns and elevation change. A local drag racing club called The Strippers was putting on the event, and the pair looked to beat the times of the uppity Denver Sports Car club members who raced the mountain course the previous year.

“It was a roly-poly course, unpaved, and not suited for our quarter-mile racers. But we still beat their times, making up ground on the straightaways,” Cal says.

The T-33 went on to win its class not only in the inaugural year of 1953 but also a year later in 1954. “The breakneck runs up the mountain course done by our hot rods stirred up controversy, and soon the Governor got involved. Next, there was a referendum to ban racing on public roads, which was soon passed, ending the HRHC for the foreseeable future,” Cal recalls.
In 1954, Cal crossed the finish line in T-33 at the second Hot Rod Hill Climb, winning his class. He then skidded to a stop and spun into this lake. Sixty years later, he reflects on where he gave his roadster an impromptu bath.

But that didn't stop Cal and Don. Reveling in the success of the Hot Rod Hill Climbs, the boys continued to push the envelope with the T-33. "We campaigned the car through the 1950s," Cal remembers. A highlight was beating the Kenz and Leslie T-67 '32 Ford roadster by a hair at the Drag Safari race held at Lowry Air Force Base in 1955.

Shortly after the event, some changes took place within the team. "Don got married and had his son Dave. I then partnered with Warren Folkers, who ran a nitro-powered Caddy V8. Warren got a lot more out of our 12-port running 90 percent nitro." They took several championships in the region, including the AHRA B/Modified roadster championship at Great Bend, Kansas, in 1958.

At the end of the 1959 season, Cal decided to do some motor maintenance. "We took the motor apart and found some hairline cracks on the piston skirts under the wristpins. I called up my idol, Harry Warner, to get a new set. He would always take care of me and knew exactly what was in my motor. Parts would just show up. I found out Harry wasn't there anymore; he sold the shop to Arias and Torres." That was the start of the end of Cal's racing career. "I'm still waiting for those pistons," he says with a laugh.

At the end of 1959, Cal walked away from racing. "I really needed to get a life. I mean, take my job seriously." He also got married and had a child, who by no coincidence is named Wayne. As for the T-33, it was dismantled. "I gave the body and chassis to

To keep with the Chevy theme, Nick sourced a correct set of 16-inch, six-lug steel wheels. They are shod in Coker re-pop Firestone bias-ply tires, 16x6.00 front and 16x6.50 rear.

When it comes to describing the interior, the word Spartan comes to mind. Just the basics here, folks. An aluminum WWII bomber seat sits on a plywood floor. The rollbar is a copy of the original, though Cal and Don used sand to help keep the bar from collapsing, Cal says it didn’t work well!

A Bell wheel keeps Cal pointed forward, while original Stewart-Warner gauges monitor the vitals.
a couple of young hot-rodders. However, the Wayne 12-port, that was a different story. I stashed the motor in my crawlspace. I wasn’t sure what I was going to do with it, but I wanted to keep it.”

**Hill Climb Returns**

Listening to Cal’s hot-rod stories got Nick revved up to bring back the Hill Climb in Georgetown 60 years after the inaugural race. Through Cal and some intensive digging, Nick found other local rodders who were there in Georgetown in 1953 and 1954 and brought them into the fold. “Cal showed passion and commitment to the way it was,” Nick explains. “I had to put on this event for him, and for the rest of these men who were there.”

With the town’s blessing, Nick kicked off the Hot Rod Hill Climb in 2013 on the same course the original was run. While the road had been paved two years prior, the excitement was still there. Not only did the people come in droves to see the tradition of the HRHC—many of the original “founding fathers” of the event were also in attendance.

The HRHC was a success, which stoked a fire under Nick to do what he had thought about doing ever since meeting Cal. “I wanted to recreate T-33; it was such a killer hot rod. We had slapped a T-33 decal on Cal’s restored ’34 Chevy roadster in 2013, but that just wasn’t enough.” Another driving force was the fact that Nick had recently made friends with Dave Scroggs, the son of Cal’s passed-away team partner, Don. Dave had heard stories of T-33 and the Wayne 12-port but had never had the opportunity to hear and see it run. “I had to make it happen for these guys,” Nick says. Having a small shop to work in and a Rolodex of friends, fabricators, and parts hounds, Nick knew he could make it work. “I was in over my head but was determined to bring T-33 back for the 2014 event.”

One guy who needed convincing was Cal himself. That is, until Nick found a ’36 Chevy truck chassis and brought the piece back from New Mexico. Next was a ’34 Chevy five-window body that was cut down, relieved of its top, sectioned vertically, and channelled over the frame. Once the roadster started to unfold, Cal could see Nick was in this for real. Without a second thought, he headed to his crawlspace and pulled the T-33’s powerplant from its 55-year hibernation.

The build forged on, with Nick getting help from several friends, including Dave Scroggs, Tom Wentworth, Phil Trill, and good friend Troy Hastings. Cal reassembled the Wayne inline-six with its same parts, including the pistons he retired with. The only new parts were two compression rings and a gasket kit. Nick had some doubts the old-timer could pull it off, but he came through with flying colors. Dave could finally hear his dad’s motor run for the first time.

The crew worked right up to the 2014 Hot Rod Hill Climb. With just moments to spare, the body was painted and bolted down to the finished chassis. The tuned-up Chevy roared to life and purred just like it last did in 1958. Cal was there every step of the way, helping fabricate pieces, doing mechanical work, and bringing the new T-33 back to life. It was a new hot rod with an old heart.

The T-33 and Cal led the festivities at the 2014 HRHC as planned, and the entire crew pushed the car off the starting line. The magneto sparked the motor to life; and Cal, with wife LuAnne next to him, took off up the incline. The roadster would then make appearances at several other high-visibility meets, including The Race of Gentlemen, the Grand National Roadster Show, El Mirage, and the Lone Star Roundup.

Though it was a tough road getting T-33 back on the traditional hot-rod playgrounds, Nick knows it was worth the effort. “Meeting Cal and recreating the T-33 has made unknown dreams come true. I think we put the ‘gold’ into Cal’s golden age.” Cal, Nick, and Troy Hastings have now traveled the country, bringing Cal and the T-33 to the forefront of the hot-rodding community.

Cal and Nick weren’t the only ones getting joy from the new T-33. Nick says, “One of the greatest gifts T-33 gave to others was a trip to Sacramento for Cloyd Ricketts’ 100th birthday. That was a reunion for the ages.”

For Cal, it’s been quite an experience, something he couldn’t have imagined 10 years ago. It’s been a whirlwind engagement, and the guys are not done yet. “My son Wayne and Don’s son Dave can now experience their father’s favorite toy. It makes my story come full circle now, with my 90 years of mileage. I’m happy I’m still able to play with my favorite toy.”
With Cal at the wheel and his wife, LuAnne, at his side, the whole T-33 crew pushes it off for its debut at the 2014 Hot Rod Hill Climb.

Cal still competes at the HRHC at its new location in Central City, Colorado.

Nick and T-33 at The Race of Gentlemen in Wildwood, New Jersey.
Cal Kennedy in the T-33 and Dave Scroggs in the orange ’32 three-window battle it out at the Dirt Drags.

Nick and his wife, Amy, also get to try their hand at the Hill Climb in T-33.
This faded image shows the Cook and Bedwell dragster at the Santa Maria starting line in 1957. The dragster had just achieved a record-setting 168 mph, and there was some worry that it would have trouble slowing down at the end of the strip. The stock Ford drum brakes managed just fine. In the background, cars are lined up to race.

A pair of Santa Maria–based roadsters waits on the starting line. On the left is Skip Gibson’s rod; Dean Shaw owned the one on the right. Note all the rods and customs in the background.
Two early “rail” dragsters take off at Santa Maria. Skip Schuyler of Lompoc in his Hemi-powered El Coyote is on the right, and Jack Childers of Santa Barbara is on the left. Both Schuyler and Childers were well-known veteran racers on the Central Coast.

The crew from Howard’s Cams brought this twin-Chevy-engine dragster out to race at Santa Maria. They fastened a piece of plywood to the frame as a form of ground effect in order to keep the front end down during acceleration.

PICS: BUD HAMMER

SANTA MARIA?

FORGOTTEN.

One of the earliest dragstrips in California is fading from memory today. For more than two decades, Santa Maria Dragstrip, on the Central Coast, was the main place to go in the region if you wanted to (legally) drag race. Locally, legal drag racing had been done at the airport in nearby Goleta since 1948. But it stopped in 1952, and, in the words of founder and speed shop owner Jerry Gaskill, “We didn’t want to drive all the way down to Santa Ana to race, so we decided to get a strip started up here.”

Jerry was also president of the Dragons car club and worked with them to acquire a lease on part of an abandoned wartime air base. Racing started in 1953, and the new strip was an immediate success. It attracted hot-rodders and car clubs from all over the state, as well as many of the rising stars in the new sport of drag racing.

The pictures in this article came from the personal collections of Jerry Gaskill, Bud Hammer, Mark Mendenhall, and Jack Chard. Several can also be seen in my books Hot Rodding in Santa Barbara County and Ventura County Motor Sports, available from Arcadia Publishing (arcadiapublishing.com).
Santa Maria car dealership Patterson Ford raced this ’55 Fairlane as a B/Gasser with a fuel-injected 272ci Y-block built by noted Santa Barbara engine guru Bob Joehnck. The Olds 88 was from Ventura; and although the car is well remembered, the name of the owner and driver has been lost over time.

Below: Before founding the Pharaohs, Bud Hammer was a member of the T-Timers, a “good guys” type club sponsored by the Elks Club. Here he is with his dad, Boaz “Bud” Hammer and his brother Bernard. From left: Don King, Bud Hammer, Boaz “Bud” Hammer, Nick Sweetland, Jack Monk, kneeling, Bernard Hammer.

Bud Hammer, of the Oxnard Pharaohs car club, began his racing career in this Mercury-flathead-powered Crosley. In this race, Bud took the record for B/Altered at 101 mph. The starting light, seen hanging from a wire at upper left, is showing green as the race starts. Below it (in the background) is the old flight line building that served as a clubhouse and snack bar.
Oklahoma hot-rodder Marcel D'Avignon moved out to Santa Barbara and took the local scene by storm with the Super Stock Ford he brought with him, one of the first lightweight, supercharged, factory-built special Fairlanes in the region. D'Avignon was a mechanic for Homer C. Thompson Ford of Santa Barbara.

“Jazzy” Jim Nelson’s insane nitro-fueled twin-flathead-powered dragster, the Outlaw, runs up before a race. The two tubular objects seen connected to the engines’ cooling lines were heat exchangers, which fed into coolant reservoirs built into the frame.

Jack Chard of the Santa Barbara Dusters sits in his flathead-powered B dragster as he waits to start a qualifying run. The dragster was built in Santa Maria using iron plumbing pipe for the frame. Scrap fenders and hoods were used to fabricate the body. Greg Carlson of the Santa Barbara Grave Gamblers leans up against Tom Swiggins’ chopped ’32 Victoria. The blown flathead sports three 16-ounce beer cans as intake stacks for the carbs, the trademark of Montecito engine builder Jay Roach.
The Patterson Ford Super Stock Fairlane, driven by Art Harrold, was another of the early lightweight factory specials. Patterson raced the car all over the state with great success.

PIC: BUD HAMMER

This B/Modified T was raced by the Bakersfield Smokers car club, operators of the Famoso Drag Strip of March Meet fame.

PIC: BUD HAMMER

The Patterson Ford Super Stock Fairlane, driven by Art Harrold, was another of the early lightweight factory specials. Patterson raced the car all over the state with great success.
Here, Chard and a group from the Dusters are seen waiting in the inspection line. Jack’s dragster was well known on the coast and continued to win after Jack sold it off. Then it eventually disappeared, like so many old race cars.

This blown ’29 Chevrolet was caught sitting in the inspection line at Santa Maria. Known to be from Santa Barbara, it looks like one of the creations of engine and hot rod builder Jay Roach of Montecito.

This shot shows the timing tower at left, with the grandstands to the right and the clubhouse/snack bar at center. The ambulance was there for appearance’s sake and to comply with regulations but usually didn’t run (not that it was ever needed). Dragons member Don Doeckle is at center wearing his red club jacket.

This good-looking chopped Ford Tudor sits at the line as the flagman waits for the signal to start a qualifying run. The dragstrip sat in a large forest of eucalyptus trees, an identifying feature that often appears in pictures taken there.

Right: The Scoville Brothers, a team from Southern California, raced this well-turned-out ’32 Ford. This image was taken during a two-day racing event in the summer of 1957 in which “the fastest cars in California showed up,” according to Bud Hammer.

Here, Chard and a group from the Dusters are seen waiting in the inspection line. Jack’s dragster was well known on the coast and continued to win after Jack sold it off. Then it eventually disappeared, like so many old race cars.
It was 1993, the Petersen Publishing offices were moving from our old headquarters at 8490 Sunset Boulevard to a big new building on Wilshire Boulevard and, understandably, organized chaos ensued. I was Executive Editor at HOT ROD, and everyone in the building had a job to perform in preparation for the big move. I took a break and ventured up one floor to the photo lab and one of my favorite hiding places: the Petersen Library. Jane Barrett, the librarian, was completely stressed. There was no plan for the library at Wilshire. Worse, she and much of her meticulously nurtured material were no longer needed.

In a large box marked “Trash” was a stack of what looked like baseball cards. But instead of a likeness of Braves third baseman Biff Pocoroba, there were images of hot rods, Bonneville cars, and Connie Kalitta’s Bounty Hunter. These were of 1960s vintage and a tiny slice of hot rod history. Jane said, “Save them, otherwise they’re going into the trash bin outside.” So I took them home, along with dozens of magazines from past issues I couldn’t bear to see decay in a landfill.

The cards sat in that same box for years until I moved into my shop and decided to look more closely. The back of each one has a Spec Sheet, with a tiny bit of information about the car along with bits of trivia. The specific card I was looking at was Number 52 of 66 in Series 1. There was a pitch at the bottom to subscribe to HRM for $3.25 by check or money order to 5954 Hollywood Blvd. It’s odd because the actual HOT ROD address was 5959 Hollywood Blvd. We’ll attribute that to an errant typographical error.

You will learn very little from these cards, but the images make up for the lack of information. In some cases, they are nothing more than definitions of hot rod jargon, like: “BLOWER: a supercharger,” or “D.O.: double overhead camshaft,” and the classic “SHUTDOWN: to be beaten.”

The images cover the entire range of hot-rodding with street rods, drag cars, customs, boats, engines, and Bonneville. It seems Bonneville held a tender attraction for the image master. Our collection is incomplete; we’re missing 11 cards in the set. I placed them in hard plastic sleeves so they can be admired without damage. The cards are a sliver of what it must have been like at Petersen and HRM in the early ’60s. Big John Mazmanian was tearing it up with his A/GS ‘41 Willys, you could buy a complete roadster chassis kit from the Dragmaster Company and build an “instant” street rod, or you could build an outrageous fiberglass creation and try to take your place next to the kings of kustomizers like George Barris or Gene Winfield.

These cards hold an attraction, because I was that kid in 1966 hunched over wild plastic models and dreaming of driving my own fullsize car one day. These were heady days for a kid who thought gasoline was like perfume and the scream of a high-rpm small-block was better than a concerto. So these cards are just 2½x3½-inch sidebars to HRM. It was like all the engines in the magazine fired up at once—every time I peeled back the cover.
This well-worn card trumpets Big John Mazmanian’s ‘41 Willys A/Gas Supercharged race car. The information on the back of card 56 says the car was called “Boss” by HOT ROD magazine, and, “Most authorities agree that it is one of the most beautiful cars in the drag racing sport.”

Stock and Super Stock racing were huge in the early ‘60s, and the Dodge Ramchargers team and Al Eckstrand were at the crest of this drag racing wave. The Ramchargers’ Hemi-powered car won the SS/A class at Indy in 1964.

The Mantaray was the car that thrust Dean Jeffries onto the custom car scene, winning the 1964 Oakland Roadster Show. The all-aluminum body is built around a discarded pre-WWII Maserati Grand Prix chassis (!) and powered by a Shelby-ized small-block Ford. The bubble top can be electrically raised and lowered.

The description on the back of this card reveals virtually nothing about this scene, but we can assume that’s an early DeSoto Fire Dome Eight Hemi in a ‘27 T roadster with four Strombergs. Note the four-bolt header collectors.

HOT ROD covered the breadth of the automotive universe. This is card number 49, with dirt billowing off Bobby Unser’s Lotus on its way to the Pikes Peak summit. Unser is featured again on card 53 in a static shot behind the wheel of a small-block Chevy-powered Kurtis Champ car built in 1952 for the Indy 500. Unser used this car to set a new overall Pikes Peak record in 1968.

Above: Among the most famous of all ‘32 roadsters is Tom McMullen’s flamed Deuce, which made the decision to put it on a card very easy. The roadster appeared not only in HOT ROD but also in 1960s television shows like Life of Riley. Ironically, McMullen eventually became a Petersen Publishing competitor when he started Street Rodder and his own publishing company. Several McMullen titles, including Street Rodder, are now part of the MotorTrend Group.
Medley Christmas T
Years ago, illustrator (and longtime HRM staffer) Tom Medley created a series of Christmas cards for the Super Bell Axle Company featuring Santa trading up from his sleigh to Jim Ewing’s iconic ’34 coupe. Tom’s son Gary found that artwork among the drawings T-Med kept over the years and turned it into a holiday-themed T-shirt. It’s available in red, white, or black, in sizes from S to XXL.

Contact:
Stroker by Medley; strokerbymedley.com
Replacement Pistons
It can be hard to find pistons for certain vintage engines, but Kanter Auto Products still makes brand-new slugs for a number of classic applications. Among its latest offerings are pistons for 322- and 401-inch Buick nailheads; 430- and 462-inch Lincoln V8s; the 410-inch Edsel V8; and a variety of Mopars, including the 361B and 413 RB engines. The pistons are precision-machined within 0.001 inch of each other and weight balanced. Many of the more popular applications have an anti-scuffing coating.

Contact:
Kanter Auto Products;
800/526-1096; kanter.com

Flathead Distributor
Mallory has added Ford flathead applications to its line of Unilite distributors. Developed just for these powerplants, the Unilite distributor features a simple three-wire hookup that makes it easy to run a stock coil, Mallory coil, or Mallory HyFire CD ignition. The all-new distributor comes with a cap and rotor and includes a fully adjustable mechanical advance. The compact housing is designed to work in engines where space around a supercharger or firewall is tight, and the QPQ-coated shaft gives it a long service life.

Contact:
Holley/MSD;
msdperformance.com
TCI Engineering’s ‘35-'41 Ford Custom IFS and 4-Link chassis features main rails that are constructed using stamped U.S.-supplied steel and fully boxed for increased rigidity while retaining the original profile. Made in the USA for 45 years, TCI Engineering offers a wide variety of options that allow you to custom tailor a chassis to meet your specific needs.

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The MIG and flux-cored-capable Millermatic 211 from Miller Electric Manufacturing Company welds material from 24-gauge to \( \frac{3}{8} \)-inch thick in a single pass. Advanced Auto-Set capabilities allow a user to select from five wire and gas combinations and the Multi-Voltage Plug (MVP) allows easy, no-tool selection of either 120- or 240V power.

**MILLER ELECTRIC MANUFACTURING COMPANY**  
(920) 734-9821  
millerwelds.com

The perfectly tuned shop stool for only $109.99. Full of function and thought, MYCHANIC’s garage stool brings modified to a new level. From the adjustable height seat, power tool holster, hardware bins, and deep, padded drawer, this shop stool is the opposite of stock. It includes a bonus tool caddy with a stand for your mobile device and a two-year warranty.

**MYCHANIC**  
(888) 328-6919  
mychanic.com

Perfect for up-and-coming gearheads, this playset has a complete set of toy tools (PN WNT-79035), including wrenches, pliers, screwdrivers—even a battery-operated shop lamp and power drill. The work chest has four swivel casters, a tool holder, two pull-out drawers, and a lower storage area for larger tools and gear, just like the real deal. For ages 3 and up.

**SUMMIT RACING EQUIPMENT**  
(800) 230-3030  
summitracing.com

CPP’s bolt-on dual-adjustable front coilover upgrade for Mustang II applications. Systems include specially designed lower control arms to mount the high-quality dual-adjustable shocks, specially designed conical springs, and all hardware. High-quality billet aluminum shocks feature dual 19-click rebound and compression adjustment for an amazing total of 361 dampening combinations. Threaded bodies allow ride height adjustment. For a limited time, spanner wrench and bearing kit is included with coilover system purchase! Complete kits start at $649.

**CLASSIC PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS**  
(800) 760-8536  
classicperform.com

Delta PAG’s high-performance brushless cooling fans use cutting-edge tech for ultimate cooling performance with increased reliability (last 10 times longer) and infinite adjustability. The thinnest, most efficient fan on the market is 2.70 inches and moves 2,800-plus cfm at 13 amps. Soft-start tech eliminates power spikes. Adjust fan speed and on/off temps for two fans independently with the digital remote. Control fans with your OEM/aftermarket computer. Relays or temp switches aren’t needed. Fan kits include waterproof wiring harness, digital controller, brushless fan, and sensor. Custom aluminum shroud: $89. Complete cooling packages: radiator, shroud, and fan(s) starting at $600.

**DELTA PAG**  
(212) 203-2912  
deltapag.com

CPP’s new 400 Series Vega Power Steering Box is a must for any hot rod application that uses a manual Vega box. This new box utilizes late-model steering technology with a 13.65:1 ratio and all brand-new components. It allows use of the original steering column or aftermarket tilt column to keep perfect alignment with the box and uses needle bearings, not the old-style ball bearings that wear out right away. Power steering boxes start at $299 with a limited-lifetime warranty.

**CLASSIC PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS**  
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**MILLER ELECTRIC MANUFACTURING COMPANY**  
(920) 734-9821  
millerwelds.com
**Small World**

It never ceases to amaze how the Deluxe audience comes through when we reach out for information on old hot rods, race cars, and the folks who built and drove them. There are several examples in this month’s Scrapbook, plus other tall tales, cool cars, and fun stuff. Keep ’em coming! But please remember to send us high-resolution digital photos, or snail mail us copies—not originals—of your precious pics.

**SEND YOUR STUFF**

Email: DREW HARDIN57@GMAIL.COM
Mail: HOT ROD Deluxe, 831 S. Douglas St., El Segundo, CA 90245

**One Photo, Lots of Memories**

We got quite a bit of response to Robert Genat’s Nov. 2019 profile of Jim Nelson, Dode Martin, and the Dragmaster team. This particular photo sent two of our readers down memory lane.

**The Fiat**

I just looked through my new Deluxe and was thrilled to find a picture of my car in the Dragmaster article. You guys have it captioned as Tom Buky’s B/Altered. I’m pretty sure Buky was the driver, and the car was actually owned by Waldo Hirschfield. It had several different drivers through the 1961 season. After the class win at the 1961 Winternationals, it set a national record at Inyokern with a driver named Beaver (I haven’t figured out who he is yet) and then won B/Altered at Indy with gasser great K.S. Pittman driving.

A gentleman from Akron, Ohio, bought it as a roller from Hirschfield after the Indy win, and Otis Smith bought it from him for his son Bill as his first race car. That’s how the Hirschfield Fiat became the Otie’s Fiat.

I have built a steel re-creation of this car as period-correct as the rules would allow, and it is currently making passes. It was a challenge to build a car that looked 1962 and get it certified. It will pass a modern NHRA tech inspection and is certified for 8.50.

About a year into the re-creation, I found and purchased the original body. It actually found me. After the 1962 season, the car was taken apart, the chassis was used to build the Hemi-powered A/Altered Otie drove in 1963 and 1964, and the body was sold to someone in Pennsylvania. It was found behind a garage at an estate sale and sold on Craigslist to a guy in Canfield, Ohio. After getting it home, he found my post on the H.A.M.B. about the re-creation and figured out from the bubble on the nose that it was the Otie’s car. He contacted me, and a deal was made. Unfortunately, it’s too rusted to fix, but we occasionally take it to car shows and display them together.

The pic of the original body has Bill Smith, who drove it in 1962, standing next to it.

Jason Miller

Our archive also turned up an unpublished winner’s circle photo of Pittman and the Fiat after the 1961 Nationals victory.

**The Dragmaster**

Great job.

Dave Huber

A man of few words, Dave sent us a photo of his “Kentucky Dragmaster,” one of the Pontiac-powered rails Mickey Thompson brought to the 1961 Winternats. Dave bought it in 1985, after it had passed through several owners, and had it restored.
Solved! Part 1

In answer to the question in the November 2019 Scrapbook section [about the hot rod at Detroit Dragway], the car was owned by Spencer Cunningham of West Dearborn, Michigan. He’s standing in front of the roadster, which was a dark blue. The guy standing next to the blonde was named Dick Baud; the girl’s name I can’t remember.

Dave Beaubien

More Dode

Dode Martin’s last major project in his shop was the marvelous recreation of the Cook & Bedwell dragster.

Mickey Bryant

We covered the tribute in Dave Wallace’s story “The Day Nitro Died” (March 2014), which included this Tim Sutton photo of Dode and fabricators Aaron Holland (left) and Kyle Phillips.

Baby Chevy

Thought you’d like to see my latest build. The car was assembled by good friend Jim “Tinny” Tinsmith of Sellersville, Pennsylvania, a real talent and former gasser owner/driver. The body is a steel ’25 Model T front half of a touring with a V6 Chevy (perfect fit), 350 Turbo, and ’40 Ford rear with a dummy QC. It gets a lot of looks and is a blast to drive with the “baby” Chevy motor.

John Tumolo
Greetings from this side of the pond in the UK. Big fan of your magazine and was thrilled at seeing the jailbar shown in Scrapbook ["The Model A in the Barn," Sept. 2019]. I also have a very original ’46 jailbar I spend my spare time on.

John Dagwell
Fine September Issue

It seems Texas doesn’t give a f about how they do it in California – refreshing [“Scene at the 2019 Lonestar Roundup”]. And, what can you say about Paul Gommi [“The Tudor in the Barn”? He’s the real thing. So skilled, tasteful. A rap of the ol’ flathead to him, the Texans, and the Deluxe.

Bill Matheson

Wanna Bet?

In the November 2019 issue, it was stated that the engine in the ’34 roadster [“The Fly”] is a Cadillac. I shared that article with my old Cadillac authority in Chattanooga. He claims it’s not a Cadillac engine but a Studebaker block and heads. Is he correct? I got a bet on this answer!

Paul Harmatuck

Interesting assertion. The engine certainly looks like the one in my ’49 Cad, although I don’t have photos of the engine, and it’s been more than 30 years. But I had the heads off, so you could say I was intimate with it.

The valve covers are clearly the same. The exhaust manifold (what I can see) looks the same. The intake in the photo is not stock ’49 Cad. Stock was a two-barrel carb. The caption in the photo showing the intake says, “It had a really choice Caddy intake and a four-barrel up top, but I wanted something different,” Matt says. What he found was a bizarre aluminum Studebaker intake that I modified to fit the engine by slightly altering the bolt holes to install it properly."

The four-barrel Caddy intake didn’t come along until the ’50s, so if it was a ’49 engine with a four-barrel, it wasn’t the stock intake or carb. It may have been later than a ’49 engine. The Studey intake may explain why it looks like Studebaker. But the owner states that the holes didn’t match exactly. If they were Studebaker heads and block, then the manifold would bolt right up. Correct? So I think it’s exactly what the article says: Cadillac motor with Studebaker intake.

The mystery is solved and you won the bet. At least that’s my judgement. Don’t spend it all in one place.

Mark Boyd

Solved! Part 2

I may know where the Trophy Girl shot was taken [Nov. 2019]. The Oceanside Sea Horses club had their first auto show at the new auditorium down at the beach. The date was December 1955. Masters Auto Supply, as you know, was based in Oceanside. I’m pretty sure they were there. I was a member of the Sea Horses and attended the show. I was 15 years old. How can it be 65 years ago?!

Quint Meland

Quint gets around. He also brought the Phil Cool AMBR-winning 1932 roadster to the Historic Hot Rod Cover Cars display, which you can read more about on page 38.
Over the Moon

In the run-up to a national event, Petersen photographers were often called on to produce publicity stills to contribute to the event’s promotional effort—especially if that event was near and dear to the powers that be at PPC.

Such was the case with the second-annual NHRA Winternationals held in February 1962. A few weeks before the Big Go West, Bob D’Olivo posed model Pat Slattery with Dean Moon’s A/Dragster, now sporting a top-mounted blower, with a Winternats poster prominently in the frame. The date of the shoot was too close to the race for this to be used in Petersen’s monthly magazines, but it could be sent out to newspapers and other short-lead media to drum up interest in the still-new event.

Rain delayed the race for a full week that year. Once the skies and Pomona’s dragstrip cleared, Gary Cagle drove the yellow digger to a class win and went on to claim the Middle Eliminator crown, his 9.33/160.14 beating Ron Stearns in the A/Modified Roadster he and Don Ratican had borrowed from Wayne Ferguson.

—DREW HARDIN
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