

Australian **Hot Rodder**

Number One
\$29.95

Dedicated to Australia's Hot Rod Heritage

Buried Treasure Found: Pirotta/Caruana Model A

Restored: Ash Marshall's AA/FD

California Cool: Norm Longfield's T-bucket



Australian Hot Rodder

Number One

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Barry Fletcher was building really cool hot rods long before they became 'old school'.

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Publisher and Editor: **Graham Smith**

Senior Editor: **Geoff Paradise**

Contributing Editor: **David Cook**

Copy Editor: **Dr John Wright**

Photographers: **Ellen Dewar, Mark Bean**

Contributing Photographers: **David Cook, Ray Finneran**

Art Director: **Helen Wilson** (www.logopogo.biz)

Advertising Sales: **Peter Shields** (0414 324 902)

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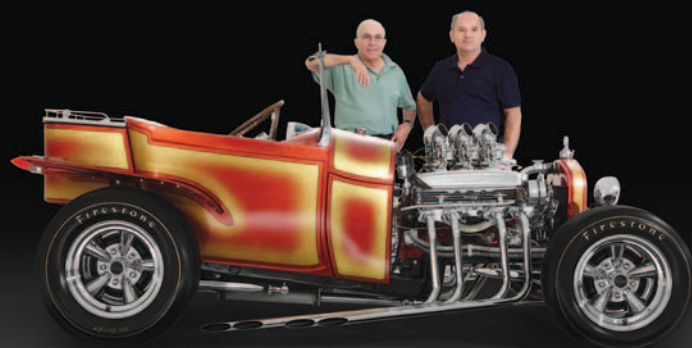
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Norm Longfield never intended to build a show-stopping hot rod, but he did anyway.

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KING PIN

As often happens with great ideas the seeds of what would become *Australian Hot Rodder* were sown over a glass or two of red late one night a few years ago when Geoff Paradise and I were swapping tales about hot rodding.

It quickly became clear that we shared a long standing love of the hobby going back more decades than we cared to remember, way back to when we were teenagers rarin' to hit the road for the first time.

It turned out that we'd both discovered hot rodding through the pages of the American hot rodding bible, *Hot Rod Magazine*, which began to appear in local newsagents in the 1950s, and we'd maintained our passion for the hobby through the years, not only through *Hot Rod*, but also the local magazines that sprang up over time to service the appetite hot rodders had for news and information on the local hot rodding scene.

A love of magazines, as it also turned out, was something else we shared. We were both working as professional journalists in the motoring field and had over the years written for and even edited many of Australia's top car magazines and newspapers.

But it was the arrival of *The Rodders Journal* in 1994 that was responsible for reinvigorating our passion for the hobby.

TRJ took hot rod publishing in a new direction, and importantly raised it to a whole new level of professionalism with a quality of journalism and photography the hobby hadn't been seen before.

Every issue was filled with great stories on hot rodding heroes and their hot rods, brought to life with equally fabulous photos.

Geoff and I would eagerly await each new issue of *TRJ*, much as we had done years earlier when we couldn't wait

(Australian hot rodding) has its own story that deserves, indeed needs to be told just as TRJ is telling the story of American hot rodding, and that's our aim here at Australian Hot Rodder.

to get hold of the latest issue of *Hot Rod* magazine when it hit these shores.

But, like *Hot Rod*, *TRJ* only serves American hot rodding, and while there are clear connections with the American scene Australian hot rodding has its own unique history, with its own characters and cars. It's a story that deserves, indeed needs to be told just as *TRJ* tells the story of American hot rodding, and that's our aim here at *Australian Hot Rodder*.

Before you get the idea that we are setting out to mimic *TRJ*, we're not, but what we are doing is using it as our benchmark for quality and professionalism.

To achieve our goal we've assembled a small, but well respected and enthusiastic team of writers boasting years of experience in the hobby, and backed them up with some of the most talented photographers in the game.

There's Geoff, of course, who cut his hot rodding teeth writing for *Australian Hot Rodding Review* and *Australian Hot Rod* before going on to edit *AHHR* and other notable titles, including arguably Australia's most successful car magazine *Street Machine*.

As well as Geoff, there's also David Cook, who's been writing and photographing hot rods and drag racing since the 1960s and continues to do so with great authority.

Ellen Dewar and Mark Bean are both highly regarded photographers who have been shooting cars for years, and

they are responsible for the majority of the great photos you see in *AHR*.

With our declared dedication to Australia's hot rod heritage it's fitting that the first issue of *Australian Hot Rodder* is filled with stories on some of the legends of the Australian scene.

There could be no better way to kick off the new publication than by having the Model A pickup built by Joe Pirotta and Charlie Caruana (below) back in the 1960s on the front cover.

It was a milestone hot rod back in the '60s when it set a new benchmark for hot rodders to aim for.

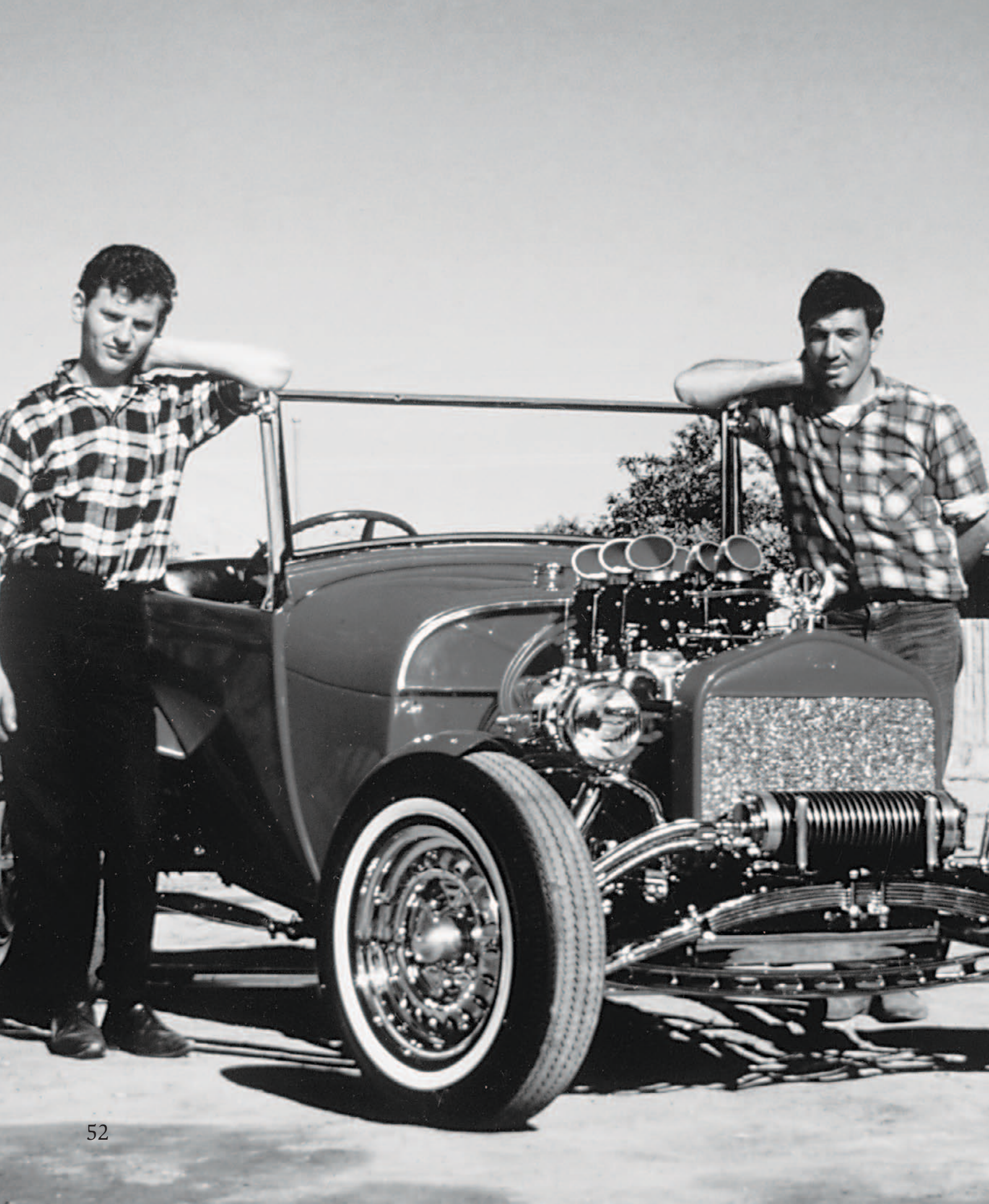
With the first issue of *Australian Hot Rodder* completed we're on the hunt for other great hot rods and customs, old and new, that have been built, driven, drag raced and shown since hot rodding began in this country and we plan to feature those we find in future issues of the book.

Australian hot rodding has a great history full of great cars and great characters and we plan to tell it in a way that has never been told before, so sit down, settle back, and enjoy the read.

We hope you like it and come back for the next issue, and many more after that. We're already hard at work on issue Number Two and it promises to be even better than this one.

Graham Smith



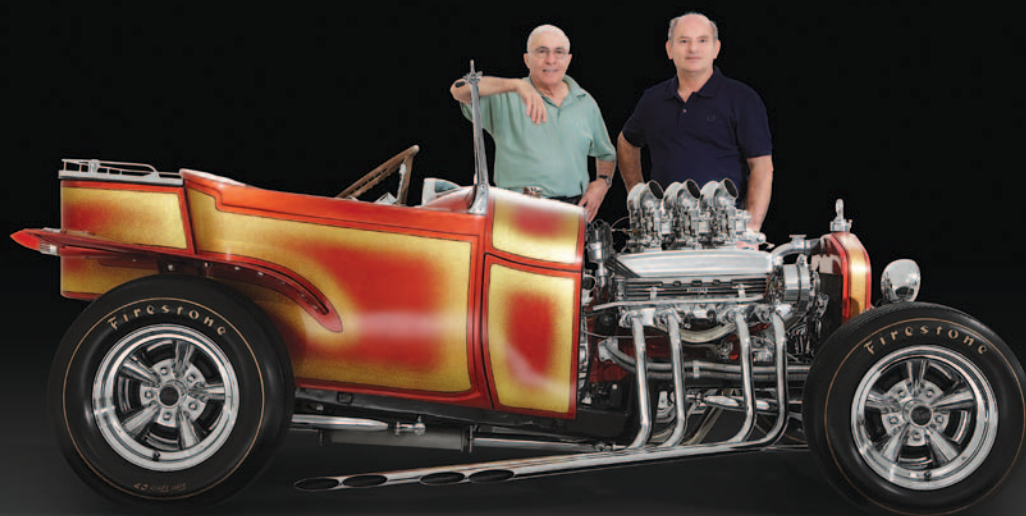




BURIED TREASURE FOUND

After being *lost* for 30 years
Australia's winningest show
rod is back on deck.

By Graham Smith
Photography by Ellen Dewar



At a time when rods were often screwed together in a weekend or two Joe Pirotta and his brother-in-law Charlie Caruana invested six years and countless thousands of hours in their stunning Model A pickup and it showed.

Swathed in gleaming chrome and sparkling crimson and gold metalflake the Model A they called *The Crimson Pirate* set the Australian hot rodding world alight when it burst on the scene in 1967. Nothing like it had been seen before.

For the next five years or so it plundered the national show scene, making off with top awards at shows in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. It even crossed the Tasman where it wowed New Zealand rodders.

Joe and Charlie stopped counting trophies a long time ago, but reckon it racked up more than 70 in the years it was shown.

In the space of just a couple of months in 1969 alone it won awards for Best Paint, Best Engine, Top Show Car, Top Car and, best of all, People's Choice at the Gold Coast show in Queensland, then backed up in Sydney where it swooped on the Best Engine Compartment, Best Metalflake, Top Car and People's Choice trophies.

Of all the trophies it won it was the 'People's Choice' awards they most treasured, because they represented the tick of approval from ordinary show-goers who were swept away by what they saw.

"We won lots of awards, too many to count, but my biggest thrill was always when it won the 'People's Choice' award," Joe told *AHR*. "The other awards were nice, but the 'People's Choice' came from the people who visited the shows."

So complete was the Model A's command of the show scene at the time that other trophy hopefuls would resign themselves to scrapping for the minor spoils when they saw *The Pirate* roll off the trailer. It was a foregone conclusion that it would take the top awards.

"You could sense people were getting jealous because it was winning so much," Charlie said. "You could hear them saying 'that car is here again, it will clean us out', but why shouldn't it win if it was that nice."

Talk among disgruntled rivals looking for a chink in its glittering armour was that it wasn't actually a runner, that it was all *show* and no *go*. But Charlie soon learned to deal with them in his own way by firing up the gleaming V8 at show's end and driving it away.

"It was just magic to watch the reaction," Joe says.





“You could
sense people
were getting
jealous because
it was winning
so much.”

Charlie Caruana

*Charlie Caruana (left)
and Joe Pirotta with the
glittering creation they built
way back in the 1960s.*

FROM THE ASHES

Like the proverbial Phoenix, a major piece of Australia's drag racing history has arisen from the scorched remains of a once-proud racecar.





By David Cook
Photography by Mark Bean

In the small single garage of a modest double-fronted red brick home in western Sydney sat what was once the core of the most exciting racecar ever to have come to Australia.

Driven by legendary drag racer Ash Marshall it had become the first Australian race car to exceed 200 mph and pushed the standard of local competition up a major notch. And now there it sat, shining like it hadn't done for over 40 years, complete with an iron blown 392 Hemi and the other mechanicals that had once been its beating heart.

I was standing in the garage of George Bukureshliev, keen drag racer and chassis fabricator. The car we both looked on so fondly was once, and was now once again, The *Scorcher*, a front-engined Top Fuel dragster that had wound a long trail of competition both in the USA and then around Australia before commencing its climb back to pristine originality.

The car had come into George's hands — temporarily — through a long and tortuous path.

What George was caring for was first unloaded from the USA in 1968 as a state-of-the-art Top Fuel dragster, fresh from original owner Leland Kolb.

The *Scorcher* was built on a chassis reported to be 177 inches, but now thought to be more like 160, which Marshall thought would be more robust than the then evolving 200-inch cars and better withstand the rigours of towing around Australia's rough roads of the late '60s.

It has previously been reported as being a Woody Gilmore chassis, but it is believed that it was actually built by Race Car Specialties. The original body was a full Tom Hanna piece.

Scorcher's fire was lit by a 392 Chrysler, dressed up to 400 cubes, with the nation's first Crowerglide (slider) clutch and first set of inner liners for the Goodyear slicks.

The claimed horsepower was 1250, a far cry from the estimated 8000 horsepower nitro engines of today.

Marshall had launched the car in a major public fanfare, but crunched it into the Armco fencing at Calder, mangling everything forward of the engine after the

steering wheel came off the shaft in the lights at only its second Australian appearance.

Scorcher was rebuilt and by mid-1969 Marshall was pushing to 7.40 seconds, and by the end of the year to a 7.34 with a best speed of 213.26 mph.

The 7.34 ET was the best Marshall would achieve in the *Scorcher*, but by the time he sold the car in 1970 he had pushed the top speed to 214.28 mph.

In June '69 he set the CAMS NSW Sprint Championship outright record at 7.87 seconds, averaged off two runs, one in each direction, the second being the most "interesting" in that it meant running back up the Sydney International

Dragway (Castlereagh) strip towards the pits, and having to thread his way through large iron fence posts at the back of the property.

Less enticingly the *Scorcher* also became just the second race car in Australia to suffer a serious fire, at the Surfers Paradise track, when the engine blew at half track in a race in April 1970, causing second degree burns to Marshall's hands and feet.

Not long after the spectacular Surfer's blaze Marshall sold the car to Brisbane speedway racer Blair Shepherd, who went on to win the 1971 Nationals with a career best 7.72s and 205 mph.

Through all the owners who followed Marshall — including the Brisbane team of Rod Farrell and Peter Dykes/Roy Smith, the far North Queensland team of Reece Davies and Noel Horton, back

to Brisbane with the team of Lester James and Graeme Scholes, then to Les Winter — it had undergone a number of changes, especially in the front end. Braces had been welded in, and old ones cut out, often crudely, with rough ends left in position. In one place a weld had been ground so far the tube itself was down to paper thinness.

What George sweated over was not his own car, but now belonged to Dennis Young, long an active racer in a variety of cars through the 1980s, before he acquired the *Scorcher* in 1988. He decided this old racecar needed a major rebuild before he could commit to racing it again with a small block Chevy.

... there it sat,
shining like it
hadn't done for
over 40 years,
complete with
an iron blown
392 Hemi
and the other
mechanicals that
had once been its
beating heart.



Scorcher back in all its 1960s splendour complete with the beautiful Dennis Braid body built after Marshall's huge crash at Calder on only its second run in Australia.

ACCIDENTAL HERO

Norm Longfield never set out to build Australia's best T-bucket, it just turned out that way.

*By Geoff Paradise
Photography by Mark Bean*





Forty-plus years ago hot rod shows were major events on the Australian hot rodder's calendar.

If we ever came close to having a national show circuit then it was surely in the late '60s and early '70s when seemingly, every few months it would be time to hit the road, attend these events and stand in awe amidst the metalflake, chrome, disco lights and glamour.

Holidays, weddings and christenings were planned around the annual shows in Sydney, Newcastle, Melbourne and Brisbane. There were also annual shows in Adelaide and Perth.

Hot rod shows had the same effect on people as a bright light has on a moth; the brighter, shinier, more glittery the event, the more people would turn up.

There was always something new, something more colourful or bizarre that would make its debut. This was the era of lace painting, multi-coloured swirls and psychedelic lettering.

It was also a time when anything went; ridiculously big engines in small British cars, slicks outside the guards and no front brakes.

Mind you, for the most part these creative liberties only applied to show cars and like many one-hit wonders on the Top 40 they disappeared as fast they arrived.

But that was the fun, the attraction. You never knew what was going to turn up at your local hot rod show. Sydney and Melbourne rivalry was alive and well in those days with both cities laying claim to a 'National' hot rod and custom car show.

The scene-stealers in the late-'60s were just two cars – one of which appears on our cover and is covered in wonderful detail on these pages – the Pirotta/Caruana '28 Model A and the other is the Buhagiar/Azzopardi '32 roadster. They were the headline acts of the day and only heightened the inter-city rivalry.

The former of course was, and is, from Melbourne, the latter was a Sydney car, and one we'd like to know the whereabouts of today.

Between them, they stole not only the show, but the trophies alternatively, like a pair of heavyweight boxers trading body blows.

And then something totally unexpected happened.

Unbeknown to them a kid from the western Sydney suburb of Guildford and his father and a mate had been beavering away in their suburban garage for more than two years building what was to become an instant show winner.

That kid was Norm Longfield, his dad, Stan and his mate was Mal Lewis.

Longfield debuted his T-bucket at the 1970 National Hot Rod, Dragster & Custom Show at Sydney's Burwood Westfield Shopping Town and scooped the pool by winning Top Show Car and People's Choice.

The response to the car, both at the show and later in the magazines of the day, was phenomenal.

It had all the hallmarks of an Oscar-winning Hollywood blockbuster; a trophy that was half the size of Norm, contingency prizes and immediate national recognition by way of exclusive covers on *Australian Hot Rod* in September and *Australian Hot Rodding Review* a month later.

Headlines in *RODsports*, the fortnightly drag racing/hot rod tabloid cried 'National Show Sensation!' and the opening paragraph of the event coverage declared that "Norm Longfield shook up the big names of the show car class at Westfield..."

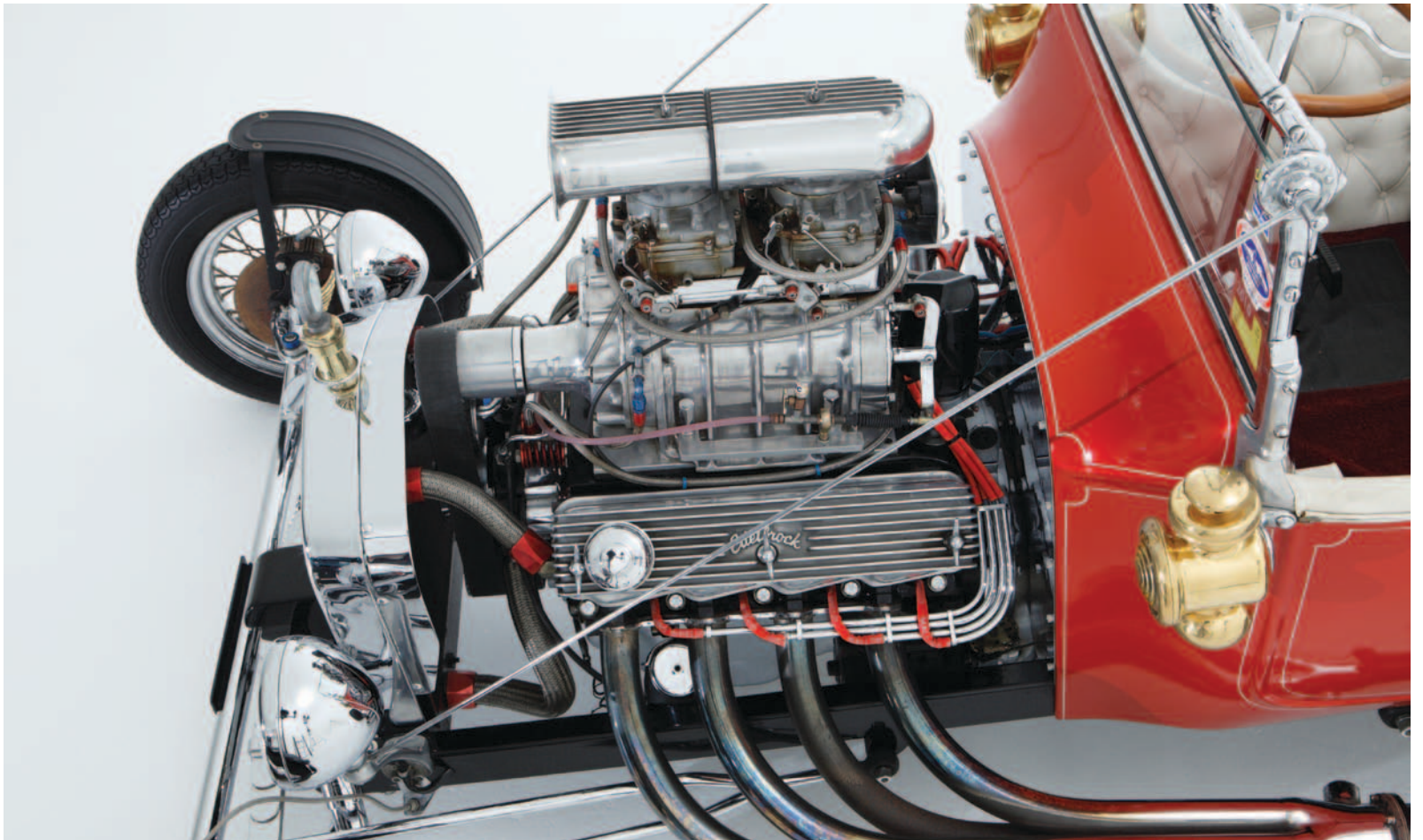
It continued "...no one expected a new car in show circles to come out on top over such jewels as the Pirotta/Caruana '28 Ford, Ron Wickham's '52 Ford F100 and the ageless Buhagiar/Azzopardi '32 roadster." It was perfection with a capital 'P', it said.

Marti Dunstan, writing in *AHRR* in the same issue that had Norm's car on the cover said "It is a mind blower almost without equal in every department."

Marti, never known to back away from hyperbole, went on to say – and rightly so, that "its success is no surprise. It's just beautiful."

Like it or
not, Norm
Longfield was
an immediate
national
celebrity but he
didn't set out to
become one.

With its white, button-studded diamond vinyl trim (top right), Smiths dials, push-button transmission shift and wooden Model T wheel Longfield's T-bucket was stunning. The blower (right) was added in 1971 for a renewed show attack.



Like what you see?

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80 Years Young: Deuce Tribute

Eddie Thomas: Drag Racing Legend

Classic Beauty: Colin Bates' Cool '36 Coupe

Australian Hot Rodder

Number Two

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Colin Bates' '36 coupe perfectly combines classic cool with hot rod attitude.

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We pay tribute to the Deuce on its 80th birthday.

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AHR's new '32 highboy Deuce roadster has been built in the image of the old time greats.

44 DALEY'S LITTLE BEAUTY

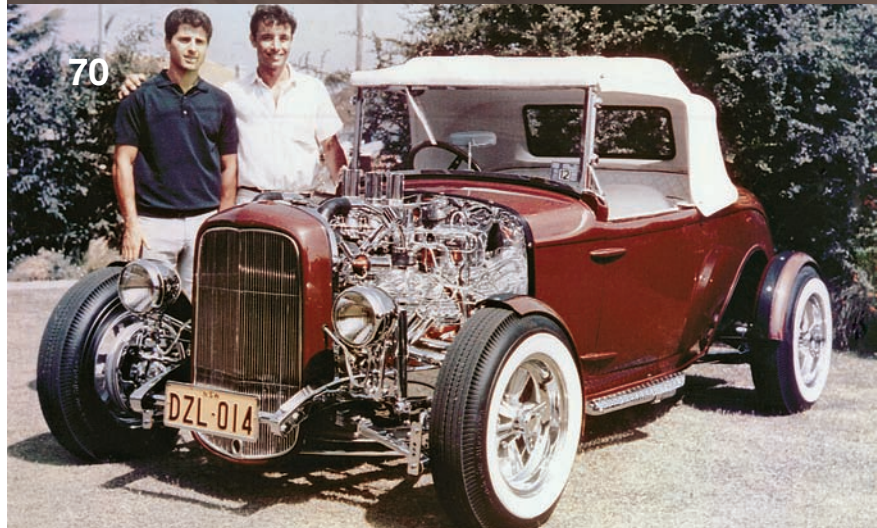
Leanne Daley is continuing the hot rodding tradition her father began back in the 1960s when he built this little beauty.

56 A SPECIAL ROADSTER

Special or hot rod? The purists might argue, but we say Ray Sprague's roadster is a special hot rod.

70 OLD FAITHFUL – THEN AND NOW

We track down the famous Buhagiar/Azzopardi '32 roadster built in the '60s.



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Neil Kelly has owned his red hot '35 Ford coupe for 52 years.

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Eddie Thomas took on the world in his home-built AA/D and became our first drag racing hero.

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Leno Pirotta turned the clock back to the 1960s and built his '34 Ford coupe the old way.

124 TIME MACHINE

Bob Keith and Lex Swain got together to recreate Keith's famous old 1966 Dragfest racer.

140 IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Leo Spessott has been to every Nationals staged to date, and all in his flamed '40 Ford convertible.



30

DEPARTMENTS

4 KING PIN

It's thought hot rodding started here when *HOT ROD* magazine arrived in the 1950s, but did it really start before that?



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A photograph of a white 1936 Ford coupe driving on a paved road. The car is in the lower-left foreground, moving towards the right. The background consists of a green grassy field and a line of tall, dark evergreen trees under a cloudy sky. The image has a motion blur effect, particularly on the trees and the road surface, suggesting the car is moving quickly.

CLASSIC BEAUTY

Colin and Kris Bates'
gorgeous '36 Ford coupe
drives as good as it looks.

*By Graham Smith and Colin Bates
Photography by Ellen Dewar*

Now cleaned up, the shell was sent off for sand blasting, this time to Masterblast in Bayswater and thankfully this time it didn't get rained on.

On return all the seams were treated with rust preventative and then a few heavy coats of etch and 2K primer. Once the primer had cured, all the seams were carefully tapped down and spot welds re-done, and it was then primed again. The original floor was still in mint condition, so seam sealer was applied to all joints to keep any moisture out.

The patch panels that were fitted back in '75 were pruned off and new, more accurate panels, were made and fitted to give crisper definition to the body lines and door gaps.

Another area that needed attention was the rumble seat opening. The rain gutters had always been a bit average, so new ones were formed and fitted, and much of the surrounding body was replaced as well.

Stress cracks above the doors and in the corners of the

rumble seat that plague '35 and '36 coupes had always been a problem, so this time steel tubing subframes were installed inside the body for greater rigidity.

One tied the door frames together and ran around the back of the roof to pick up the rear window lift mechanism and parcel shelf as well. Another ran from about the middle of the door pillars back to the very rear of the body and crossmembers tied the rumble seat opening to the inner subframe structure, and they also provided more than adequate mounts for the inertia reel seat belts.

Next Colin decided that it would be good to treat the floor and inside of the body to a full gloss finish, so a few coats of 2K primer and lots of blocking back by hand had the inside ready for colour, this time in 2K.

Choosing the colour proved to be one of the biggest challenges in the rebuild. It had always looked good in white, so good that it had been widely copied by other



hot rodders and Colin and Kris considered painting it another colour this time just to be different. In the end they decided to stick with white, it just seemed the car's rightful colour, but settling on the right shade of white also proved something of a headache.

"We toured around dealers, used car yards, car parks, even followed cars up streets, everywhere we went we'd check out the white cars we saw," Colin says. "But everything we saw either glared or looked yellowy."

That was until one day they spotted a Holden Camira in a scrap metal yard and liked the colour. That colour was *Alpine White*.

Colin again did the paint preparation and application of the acrylic, although his mate Brendan Burke helped out by doing the final rub-out and compounding when Colin tired of rubbing the coupe's complex body lines.

In a neat connection with the past, Burke had worked

with Peter Leech in the 1970s, the same Peter Leech who applied the original white enamel for Bill Barling.

It was then time for the chassis to get some attention, and after it was stripped and sand blasted the frame was fully boxed for maximum rigidity, and a new centre X-member was made up in 5 mm steel to match the appearance of the original member.

The Customline rear springs were de-arched and shortened at the rear so the shackles could be mounted in tubes set into the frame rails, new shorter shocks were sourced, and all rear-end components were rebuilt and finished in black powdercoat.

A '39 axle, dropped by Gary Page, was installed at the front with stock radius rods, new steering arms were fitted, and again everything was rebuilt and powder-coated in black.

All fasteners were zinc-plated to contrast with the gloss white chassis.

Choosing the colour proved to be one of
the biggest challenges in the rebuild.

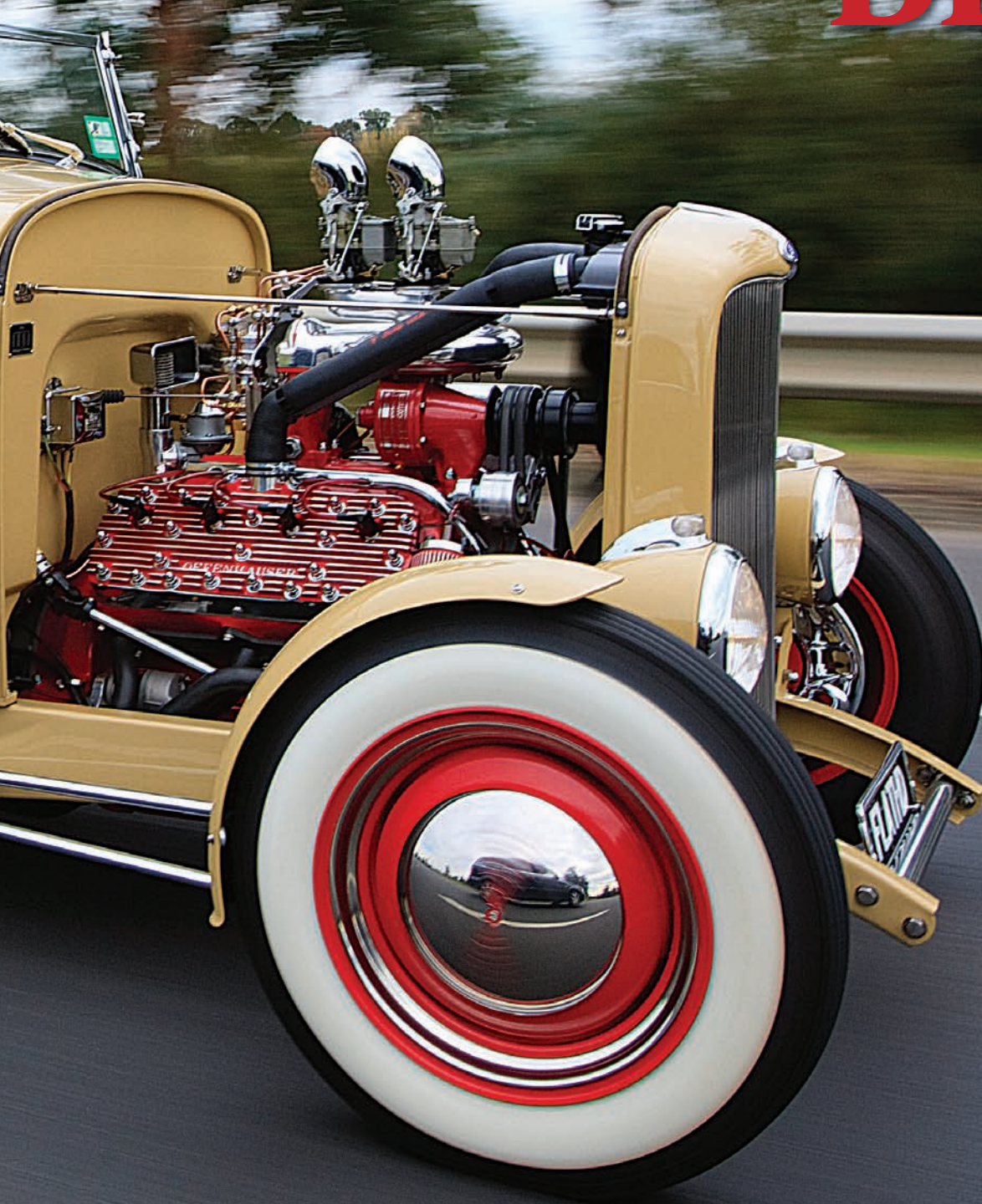
The '36 Ford appealed to Bates long before he bought the coupe in the 1970s. Three decades on it's still a favourite.



**Some hot rods are tough, others are cool,
the Lil' Brown Deuce is simply sweet.**

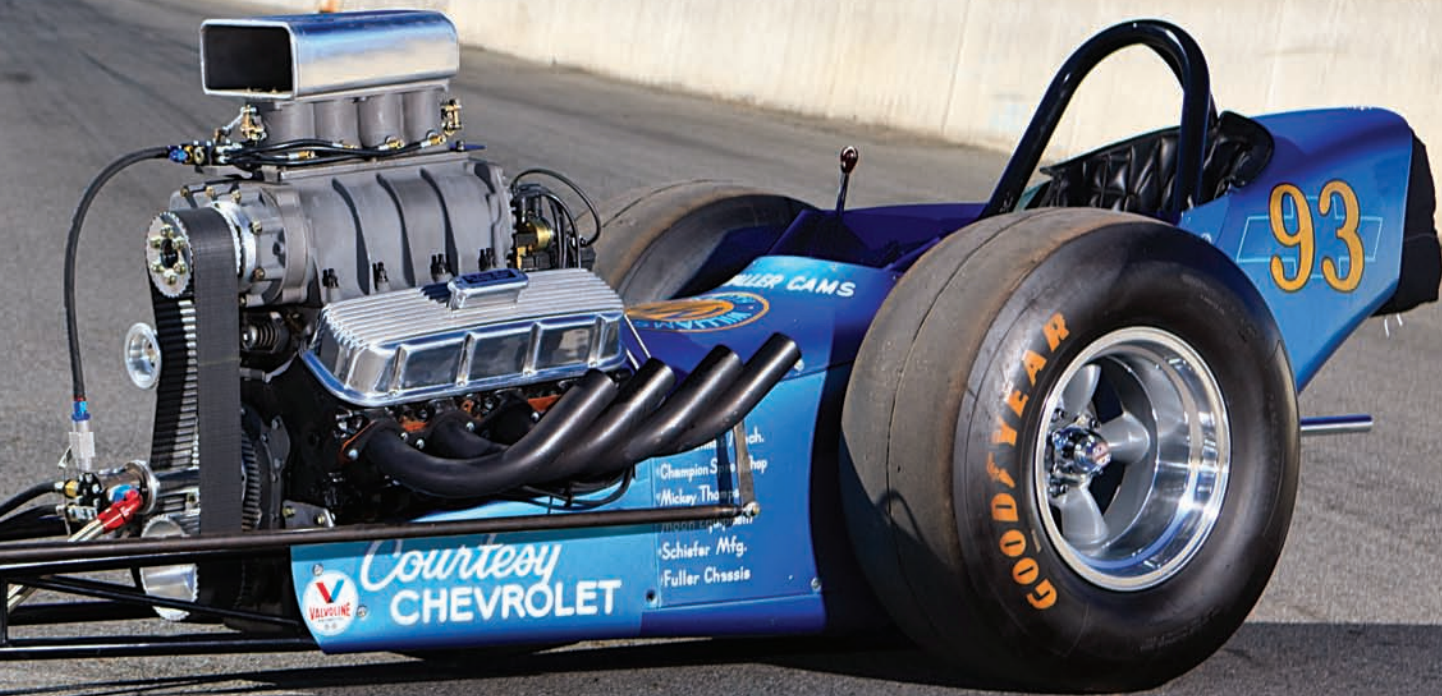
*By Graham Smith and Geoff Paradise
Photography by Ellen Dewar*

LIL' BROWN DEUCE



TIME MACHINE





Bob Keith's re-created dragster transports us
back in time to 1966 and the first Dragfest.

By David Cook

Photography by Ellen Dewar and David Cook

splash up on the headers and turn to steam so I couldn't see where I was going, and I didn't have any goggles on so I kept having to close my eyes because of the water.

"I ran 163 mph (262 km/h), with my eyes mostly closed, which was quicker than anything they'd run over there.

"Anyway, as the day progressed the weather got better and everybody got to make runs and it turned out well.

"Wally was pretty smart in setting that thing up. He had two Top Fuel cars (Ivo against Garlits), two Top Gas cars (me and Tony Nancy), two blown AA/Gas Supers (K.S. Pitman against 'Ohio George'), two stock cars (Sox and Martin against Jenkins), and they took two motorcycles and the little Porsche-powered car. It was quite a group of guys.

"The British had no idea how big our trailers were. We had to bring spare motors, and parts and tyres and blowers, at least two of everything; there were no parts over there.

"And here they come to the docks to pull these big trailers with Hillman Minxes and Cortinas and God knows what. So Sydney Allard went to some war surplus place and bought these World War II 4WD trucks. They even had gun turrets on top. They were slower than the seven-year itch but they had the horsepower to pull the trailers.

"There were quite a few English cars, some of the most oddball things you'd ever want to see. They had Jaguar engines in ugly looking frames. One had a Buick straight-8 and there was some crazy stuff, but that kicked off drag racing in England on that one trip.

"We went back a second time in 1965 with just some Top Fuel cars. That trip was pretty much a disaster because it rained so much and we didn't get in a lot of runs.

"I was invited back as team captain, but Wally told me they only wanted Top Fuel cars. That's when I built the Fuller car and I put a Chrysler in it. I'd driven fuel cars and I was never keen on it. I always thought gasoline was much more of a challenge than nitro.

"So, we built the Fuller car with the Hagemann body and Arnold Chaves built a Chrysler for it. It was a 392 and by the time we got done it was 484 inches, I think.

"I had Hilborn set it up for alcohol. I thought they aren't going to know the difference between alcohol and nitro.

The little blue
dragster is race-
ready, able to do
a skid, just as
it did a lifetime
ago, and that's as
it should be.

I made, I think, three passes in the US and then shipped it to England. We fired it up on alcohol for the first time over there, and I had 'Bones' Carroll of Carroll Brothers and Oxman – they had a really good Top Fuel car – come over to adjust the barrel valve and the car ran flawlessly the whole time I was there."

When the NHRA and the new British Drag Racing Association decided they didn't want the financial gamble of shipping in US racers any more Keith was reluctant to see something that had been so much fun die, so he wrote to a name he'd picked up for Australia. That name was Tom Floyd, the editor of a new magazine called *Australian Hot Rodding Review*, who was also writing articles for the US magazine *Drag News*.

The next thing was another phone call from Wally Parks seeking the Keith/Williamson/Goodnight team's participation in a tour to Australia in 1966.

That led to a conversation with the owner of Courtesy Chevrolet, a Chevy dealership in San Jose where Williamson worked.

The owner, Bob Hamilton, sight unseen, offered a sponsorship of the car if the team would run one of the new 396 Chevy big block engines.

When Keith said that there were no speed parts available yet Hamilton retorted, 'Well, can't they be made?' and then made the dangerous (for a sponsor) statement that "money was no object".

So the guys set off around LA, talking to people like Mickey Thompson (valve covers, blower scoop and magnesium Olds diff centre), Cragar (blower manifold and blower drive), Joe Hunt (magneto), Mondello (heads) and Dean Moon (timing cover and fuel tank).

Arnold Chaves bolted it all together, along with a stroked crank and bored the block to achieve 502 cubes and it became the first blown big-block Chev ever built.

"We only made two or three passes with that car at Pomona before we shipped it to Australia," Bob recalls. "It was the Winternationals, and they wanted us to compete but I said 'No' because I was afraid we'd tear something up and wouldn't have time to rebuild for the Australian trip.

"It ran some pretty good speeds and ETs and I said to

The re-created Bob Keith rail will remain in Australia despite the desire of the Don Garlits and NHRA museums to have it in their collections in America.



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Dedicated to Australia's Hot Rod Heritage



Pure Nostalgia: Graeme Blaby's '33 Coupe

Pass Master: John English

Found: Mitchell Brothers' Surf Buggie

Australian Hot Rodder

Number Three

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Publisher and Editor: **Graham Smith**

Senior Editor: **Geoff Paradise**

Contributing Editor: **David Cook**

Copy Editor: **Dr John Wright**

Photographers: **EDP, Mark Bean**

Contributing Photographers: **David Cook, Ray Finneran**

Art Director: **Helen Wilson** (www.logopogo.biz)

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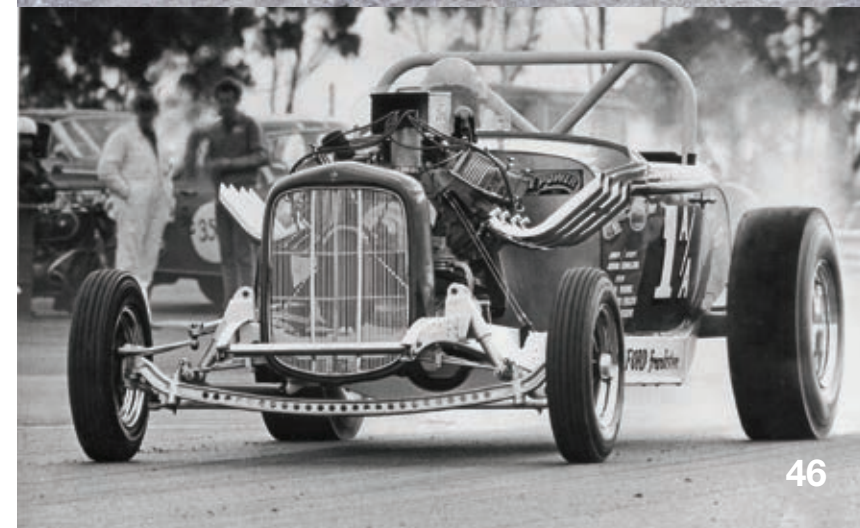
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RACE 'N' ROAD STAR

Tony Mullen's Deuce roadster was one of the fastest hot rods around in the 1960s.

*By Graham Smith
Photography from Tony Mullen's collection*

In 1965 there was no faster hot rod in the country than Tony Mullen's little red roadster, it was unbeatable on the street and almost as unbeatable on the strip as well. Only John English and his lightweight altered roadster regularly had his measure at the drags.

In a showdown on the road Mullen says he could easily reach 90 mph (145 km/h) within a single city block. He never discovered what the Y-block Ford-powered Deuce roadster would ultimately do on the open road, he says he wasn't game to fully open it up, but he regularly pushed it to 120 mph (193 km/h) and on those occasions he did he reckons it still had plenty left.

It was so fast that he never had any fears about the police catching him. "They never had anything fast enough," he told *AHR* with a wry smile.

It's not surprising really, the Victorian police at the time were mostly driving six-cylinder Falcons and Holdens, which wouldn't reach 100 mph (161 km/h) even with a tail wind, and needed 18 or more seconds for the quarter-mile. The hottest car they had at their disposal was the lumbering V8-powered Studebaker Lark and even that would have had a tough time catching Mullen and his little roadster.

If Mullen's roadster was the king of the road, it was just as much at home on the drag strip where the young Geelong-born electrician would regularly make 14-second runs with terminal speeds of 100 mph (161 km/h) or more.

The other road-going hot rods and sports cars he came up against at Riverside Dragway rarely troubled him. He remembers Darryl Harvey beating him a couple of times in his Y-block powered '34 Ford roadster, but the only car that really gave him any grief was John English's lightweight altered roadster when they met up during the elimination run-offs.

"I always seemed to come up against John in the eliminations," he said. "It was usually in the final."

Mullen began going to the drags when he first got his driver's licence in 1959. They were then staged at Pakenham and whenever they were on Tony and his mates would pile into his VW Beetle and head down the old Geelong road to take in the wheel-spinning action on the mostly dirt strip on the other side of Melbourne.

"There was a 50-foot long concrete pad at the start," he said. "You'd see the cars take off, but then they'd disappear in a cloud of dust."

But there were times when the two hour long trip turned out to be for nothing after rain or something else caused



Mullen's roadster in its ultimate form with heavily modified Y-block V8 and four Holley 94 carburetors mounted on a homemade MAN-A-FRE-style intake.

The roadster was so fast that he never worried about the police catching him.

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

Graeme Blaby built his California dream car, but found the reality of life in Australia made it hard to enjoy.

*By Graham Smith
Photography by EDP*



and another 80 in the top of the bonnet, enough to inspire members of the Slingshots to dub it the “Cheese Grater”.

When it came time to paint it he turned to Greg Curtin to apply the acrylic. The chosen colour was British Racing Green, but when that turned out to be a little murky they added some extra green and it became Curtin Green.

A lighter green was chosen for the wheels and suspension components underneath the car.

“Those early Fords all had contrasting wheels, so I mixed up a lighter shade of green using a lot of little touch-up cans of paint until I got the colour I wanted and then got it mixed,” he said. “The guy who mixed it called it Jag Wheel Green.”

Marine five-ply was used for the floor; it was also used for the panel in the roof, which was trimmed in black vinyl.

With the body removed, the chassis could take shape. There’s no boxing, and the front crossmember is stock ’33, but Graeme modified the centre crossmember to accept the Aussie four-speed and made up a new rear crossmember, which had to accept a Model A buggy spring needed to clear the quick-change. He tack-welded it together himself, but got a licensed welder to come in and complete the job.

The Super Bell tube axle was hung at the front using a Ford 10-10 van spring and the telescopic shocks and four-bar ends and bushings Ewing had supplied. The only modification Blaby made was to lengthen the four-bars to prevent bump steer.

Having got the quick-change home he took it and everything else needed to put it together to a local toolmaker to assemble it and convert it to Customline axles.

While everyone else was polishing the quick-change centre and painting the side bells, Graeme did the opposite by polishing and plating the bells and painting the centre, apart from the rear cover that was polished.

It was then mounted on a chromed buggy spring with telescopic shocks, and reinforced ’36 Ford radius arms to locate it.

The Super Bell Super Stopper disc brakes Ewing provided were fitted at the front and Customline drums were fitted to the rear axle.

The original side-steer set-up was retained, but the old Ford steering box was replaced with one from a VW Kombi he found after searching local wreckers for one that was compact enough to fit where it needed to go.

First up, 16-inch Plymouth wire wheels were mounted at the corners, they were stock at the front, but widened to eight inches at the rear, and then finished off with ’33 Ford hubcaps and polished trim rings. Graeme’s treasured Firestone dirt track tyres were fitted at the rear, and some Avon motorcycle tyres were fitted at the front.

Later, the wheels were changed to 15-inch ‘Fish’ reproduction Halibrands Brian Bauer had bought in the USA with money Graeme got from the Model A doors he

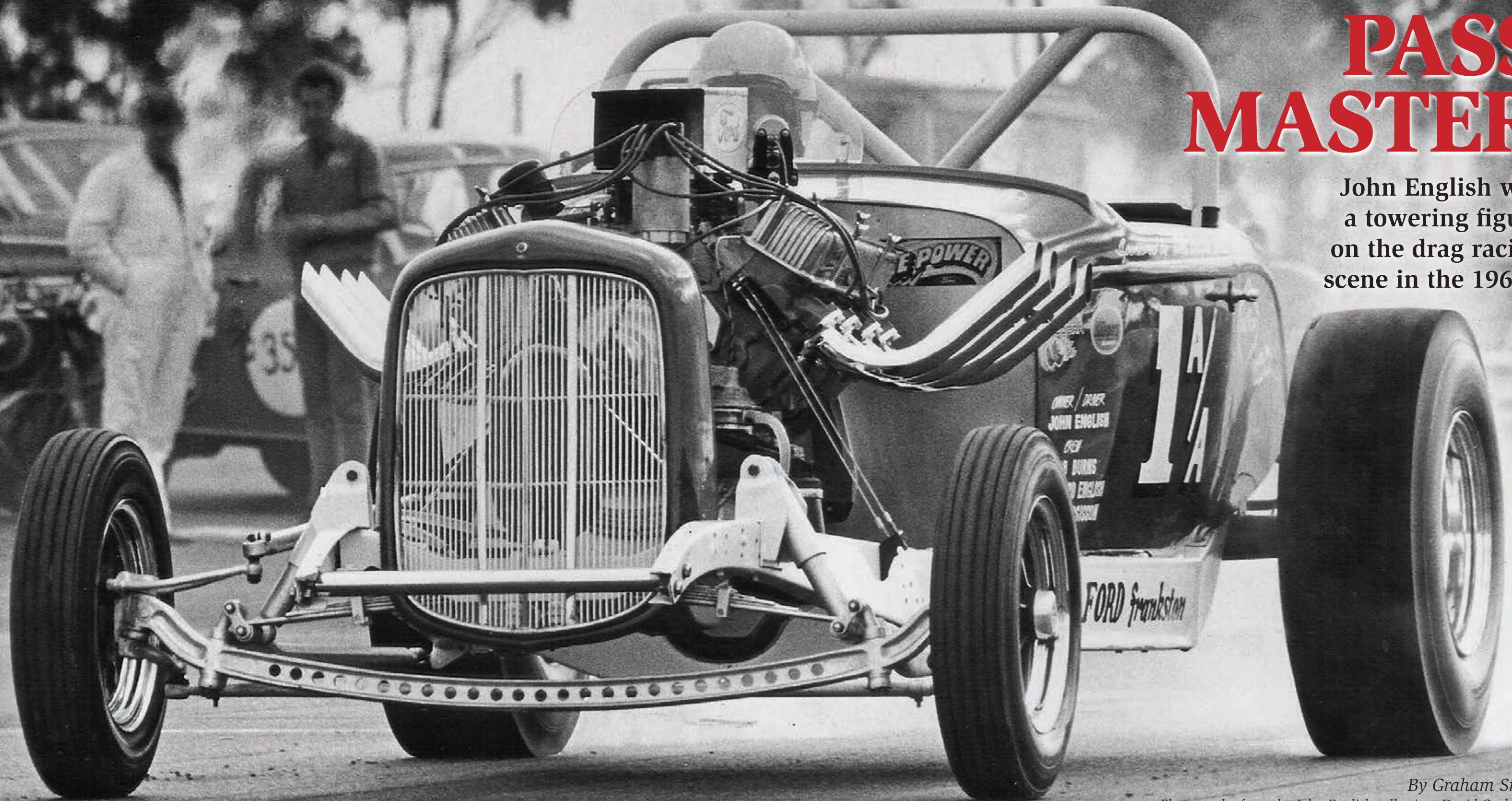
“You didn’t have to be a genius to get it right, it was kind of like joining the dots.”

Graeme Blaby



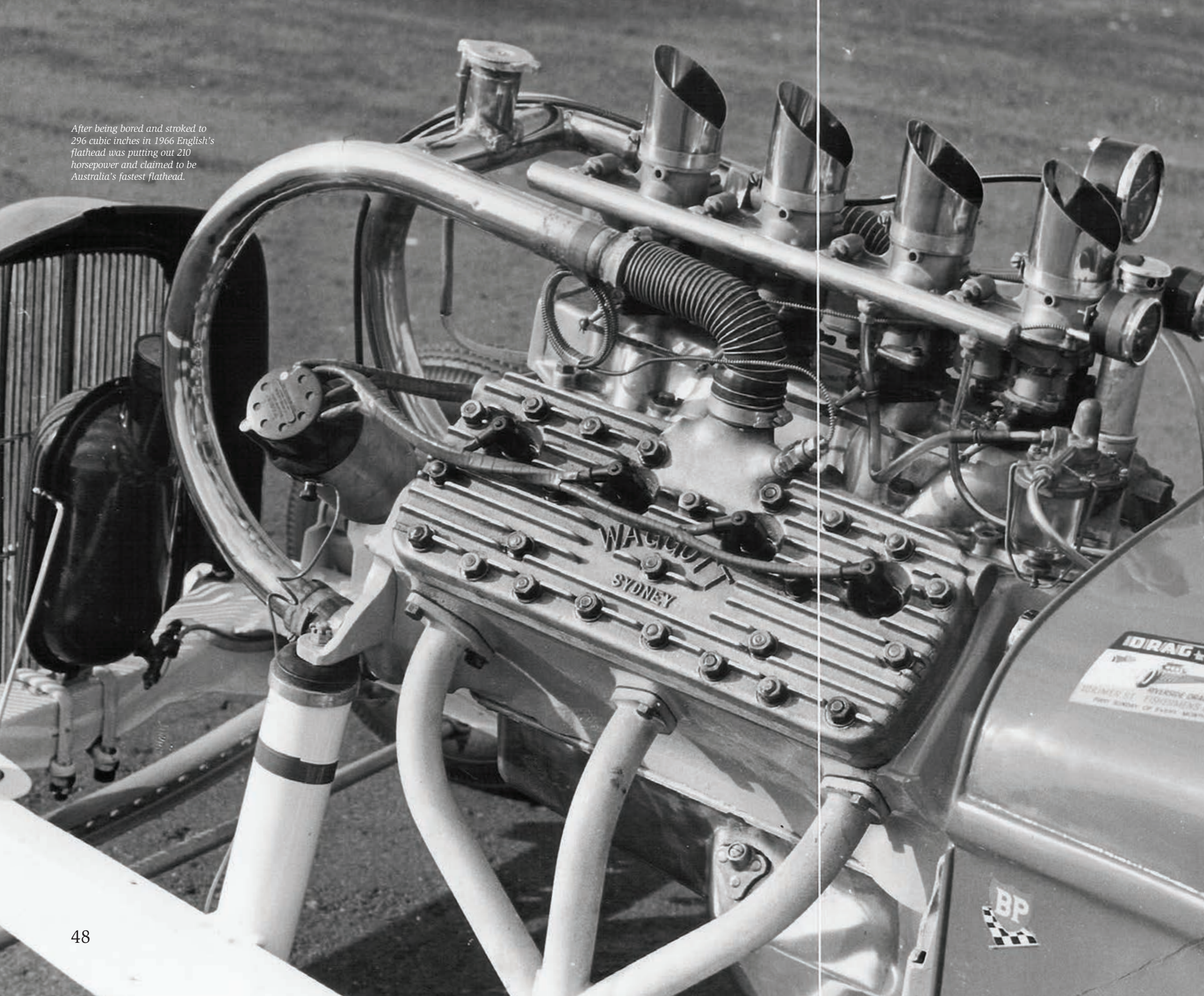
PASS MASTER

John English was
a towering figure
on the drag racing
scene in the 1960s.



*By Graham Smith
Photography from the John English collection, David Cook, EDP*

After being bored and stroked to 296 cubic inches in 1966 English's flathead was putting out 210 horsepower and claimed to be Australia's fastest flathead.



They were the sort of parts you'd find in any hot rodder's shed, a flathead V8, an old Ford front axle that had been drilled, a split front wishbone, an early V8 Ford diff, but these weren't just any old Ford parts, they were parts of John English's racing Deuce roadster, perhaps the only parts of the car left.

There, in a shed in the old gold town of Ballarat an hour or so west of Melbourne lay the remains of one of the most famous, and revered, drag racing cars ever to burn rubber in this country.

When John English retired his hard charging roadster in the early 1970s he didn't just sell it like most people would, instead he broke it up and disposed of it part by part. Why? Simple really, he didn't want anyone else to own it and that was his way of ensuring no one ever would. "It was mine and I didn't want anyone else to have it," he bluntly told *AHR*.

He got his wish, for while a number of parts have survived, no one has yet been able to reassemble the famous roadster. Instead, those who have parts of the car tucked away in their sheds prize them as mementos of one of the all-time greats of drag racing.

It's not surprising they're so highly valued, for between its winning debut at Riverside Dragway at Fishermans Bend in 1964 and its final gearbox-busting blast down the quarter-mile at Adelaide International Raceway in 1972 English's roadster was rarely beaten.

Such was his drawing power that John Fleming, the promoter of the Sydney International Dragway at Castlereagh would phone him in the week leading up to a meeting at the Sydney strip to make sure he would be making the trip up from Melbourne. English was one of the big drawcards of the day and promoters knew he would pull a crowd to their drag strips, they also knew he would attract other racers eager to try and beat him, ensuring spectators would see a full entry.

"John's car was good looking and always well presented," Fleming told *AHR*. "It was also reliable and ran well, and almost always won its class, so we were keen to have it."

Before one such meeting at Castlereagh Fleming let it be known that anyone who reckoned they could beat English and his little red roadster was welcome to try. According to the veteran racer 14 hopefuls put their hand up.

When he found out about the plan he told Fleming to run them off against each other to whittle it down to the seven fastest and he would run against them. He duly did, and beat every one of them.

Remarkably, for most of the period he dominated the