

Australian **Hot Rodder**

Number One
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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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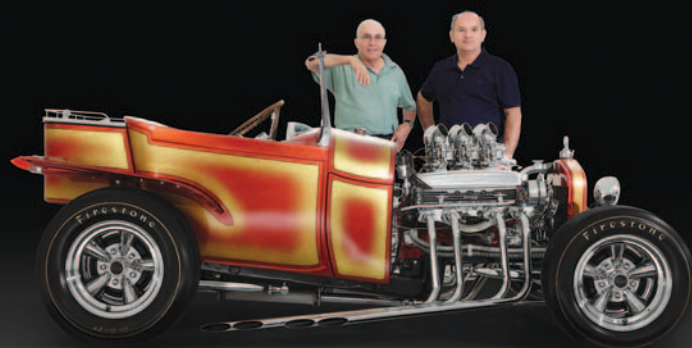
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KING PIN

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.

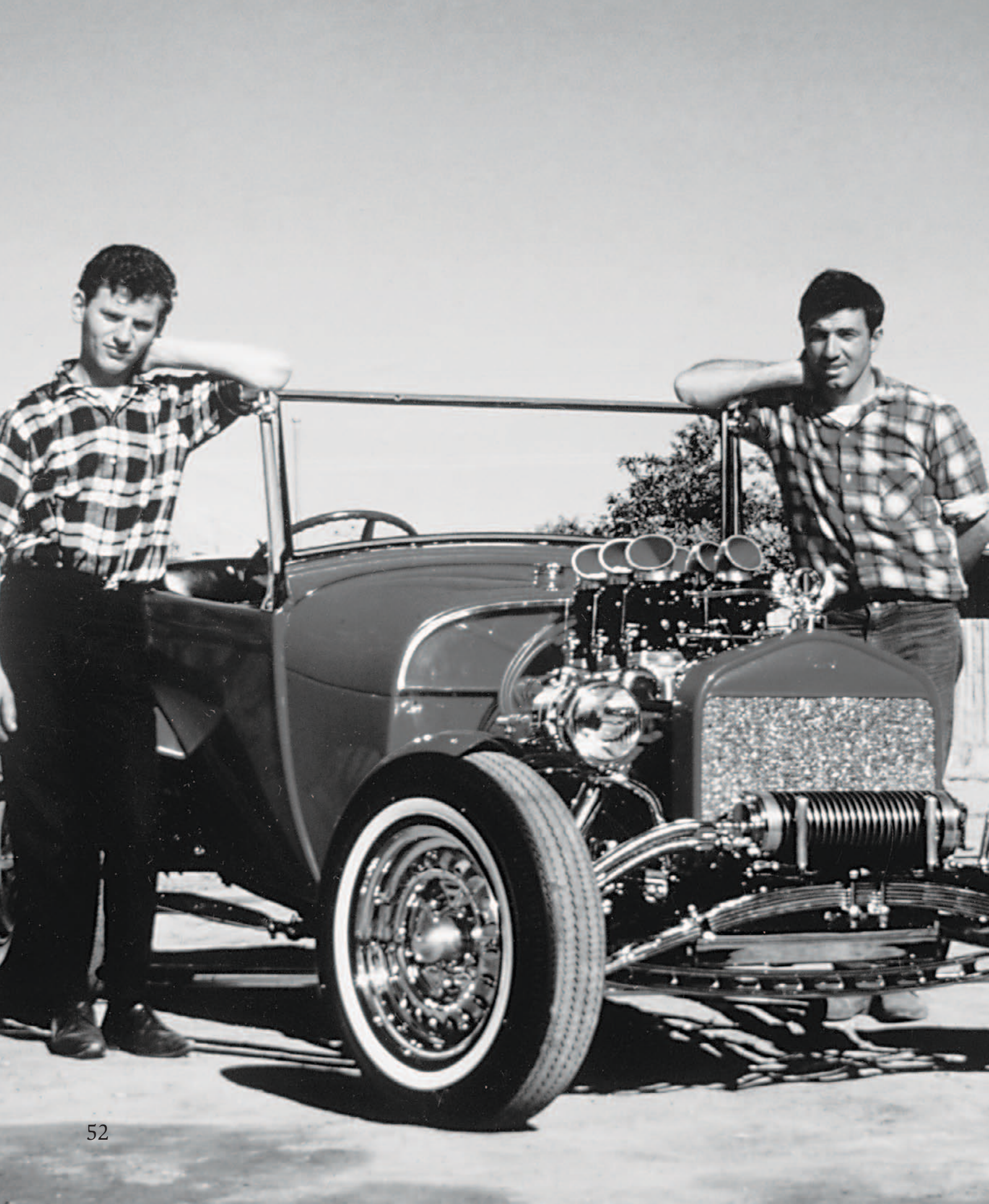
With the first issue of *Australian Hot Rodder* completed we're on the hunt for other great hot rods and customs, old and new, that have been built, driven, drag raced and shown since hot rodding began in this country and we plan to feature those we find in future issues of the book.

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



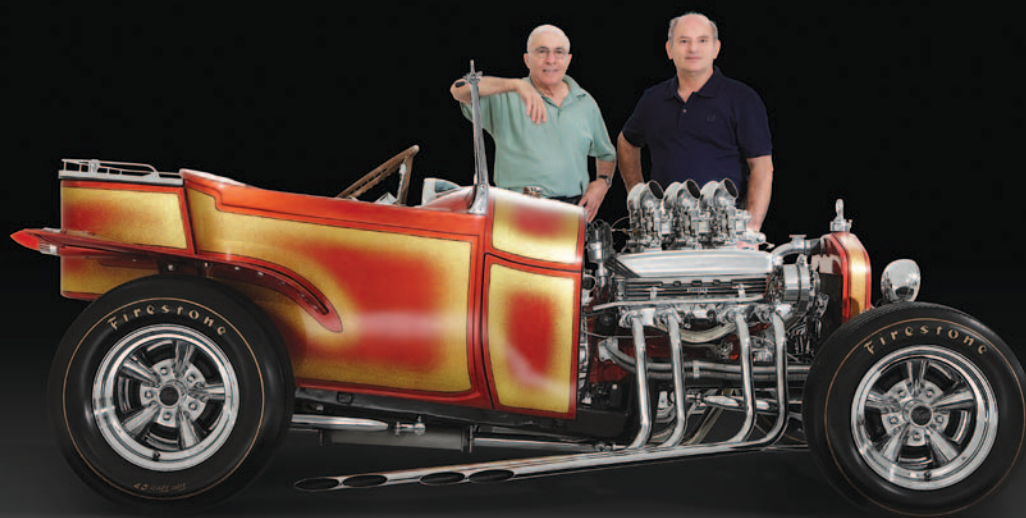




BURIED TREASURE FOUND

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.



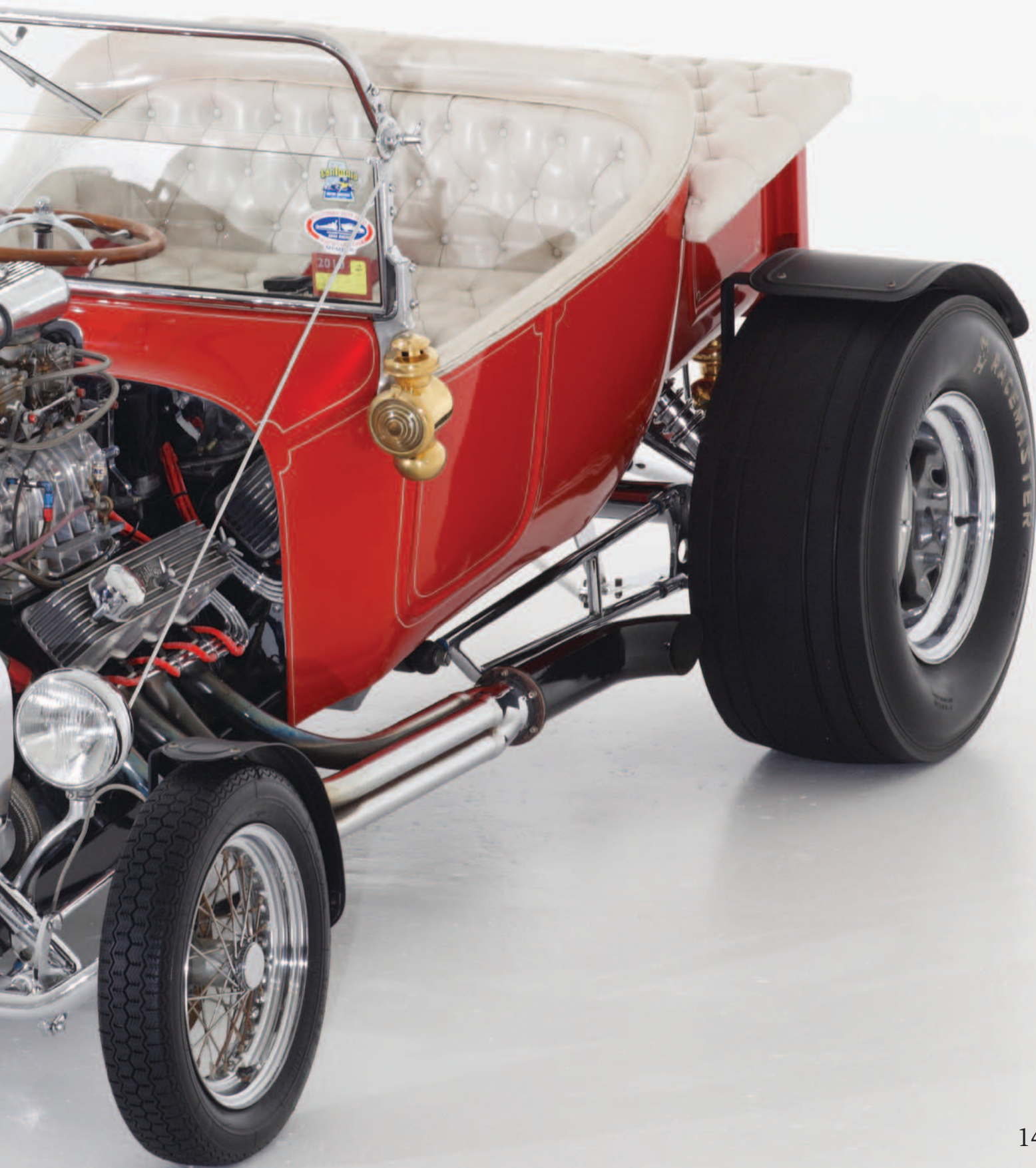
Scorcher back in all its 1960s splendour complete with the beautiful Dennis Braid body built after Marshall's huge crash at Calder on only its second run in Australia.

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..."

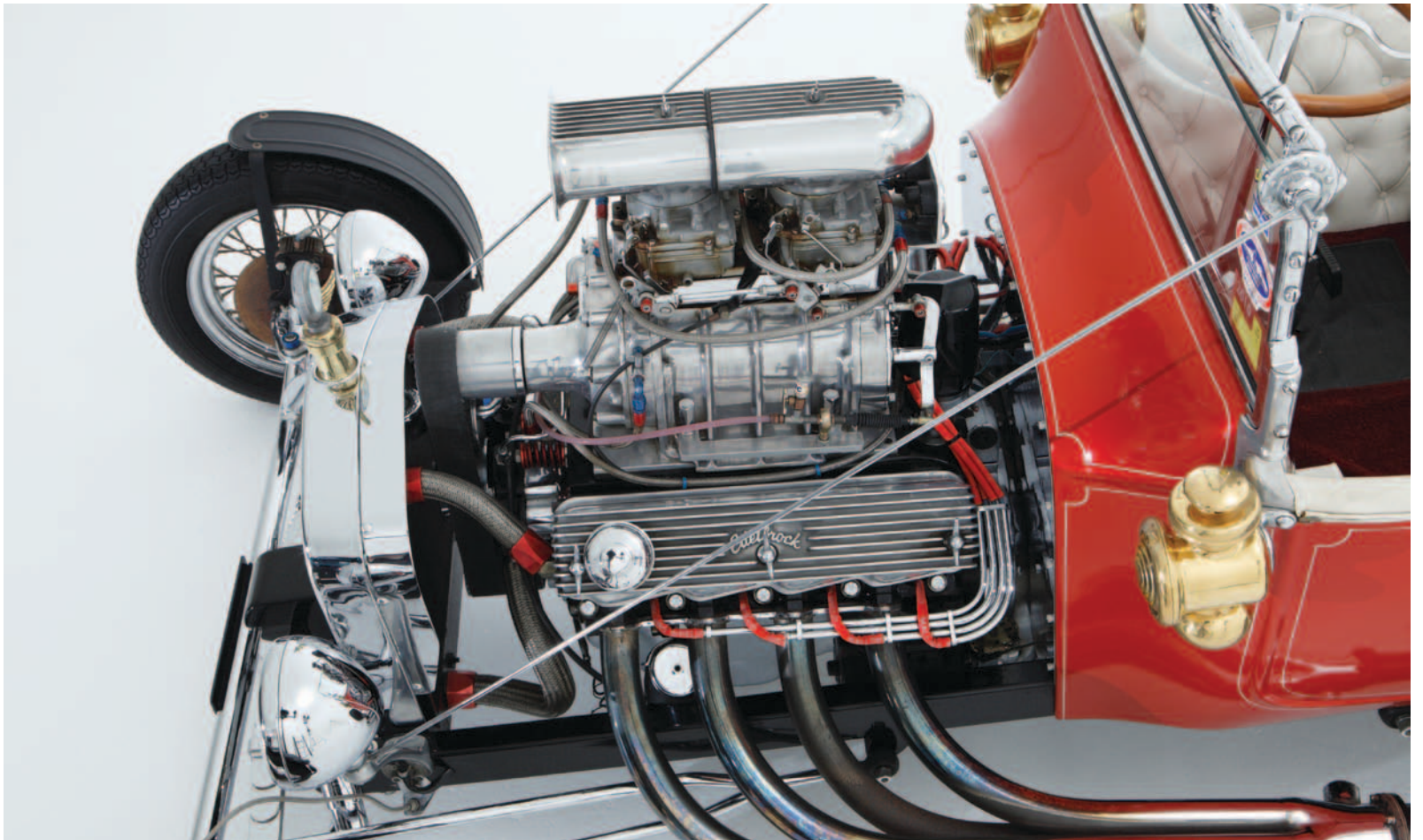
It continued "...no one expected a new car in show circles to come out on top over such jewels as the Pirotta/Caruana '28 Ford, Ron Wickham's '52 Ford F100 and the ageless Buhagiar/Azzopardi '32 roadster." It was perfection with a capital 'P', it said.

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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