

Australian **Hot Rodder**

Number Three
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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

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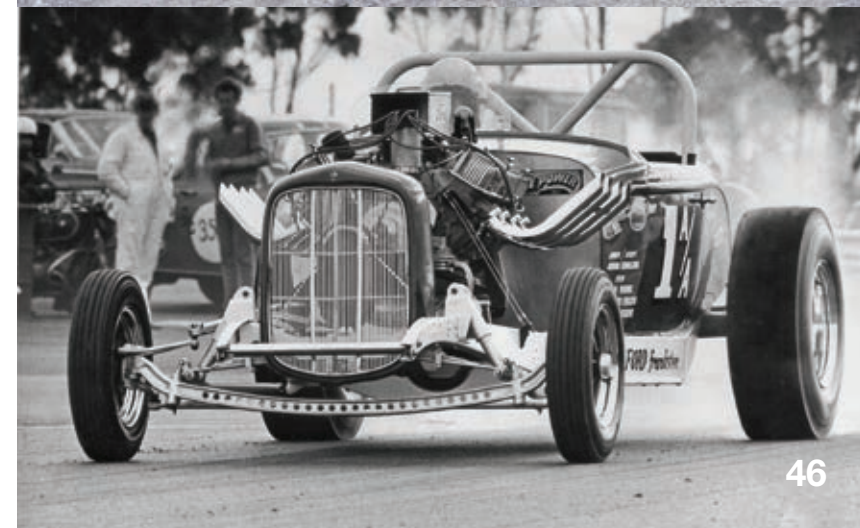
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RACE 'N' ROAD STAR

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

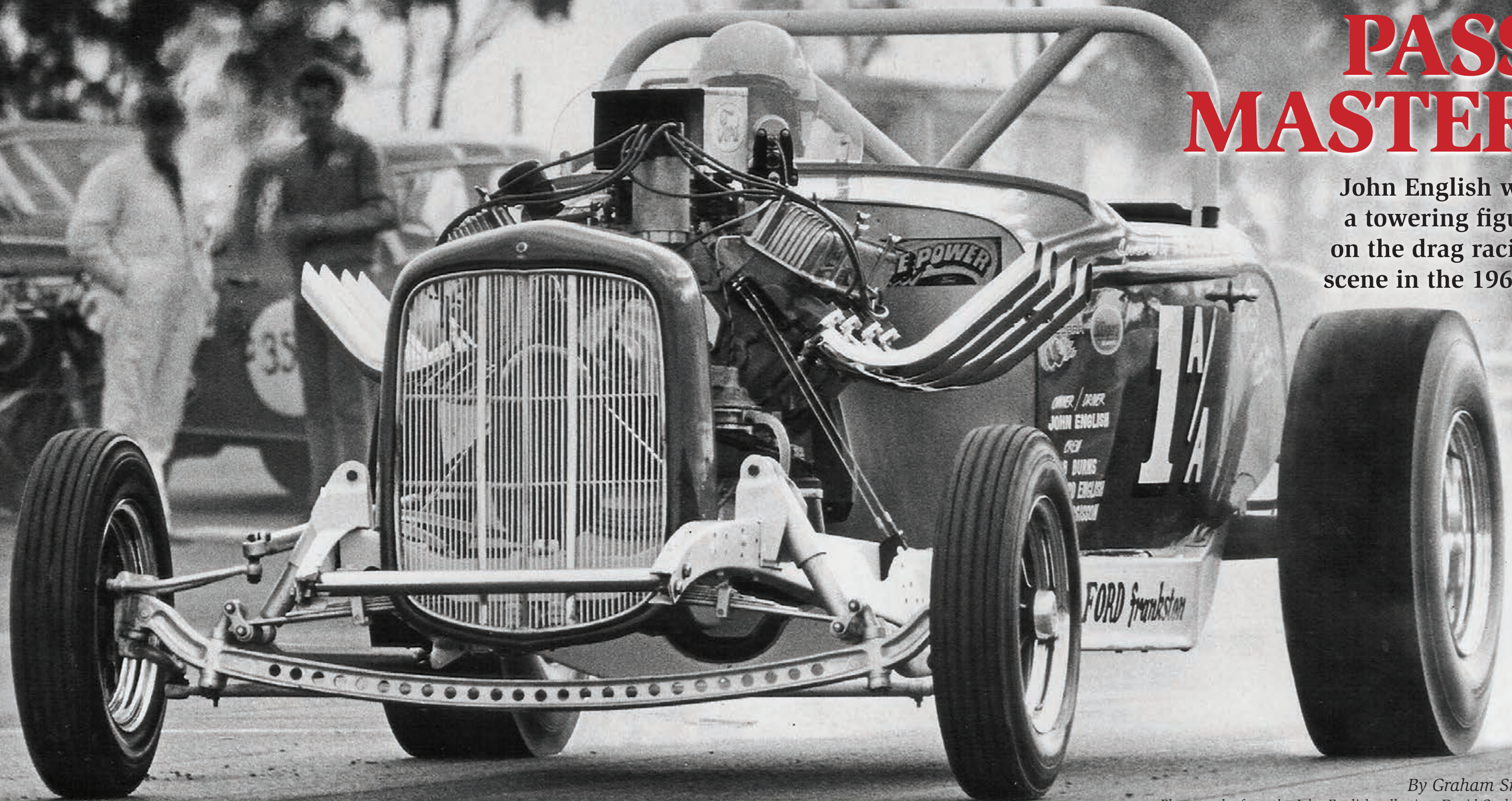
“You didn’t have to be a genius to get it right, it was kind of like joining the dots.”

Graeme Blaby



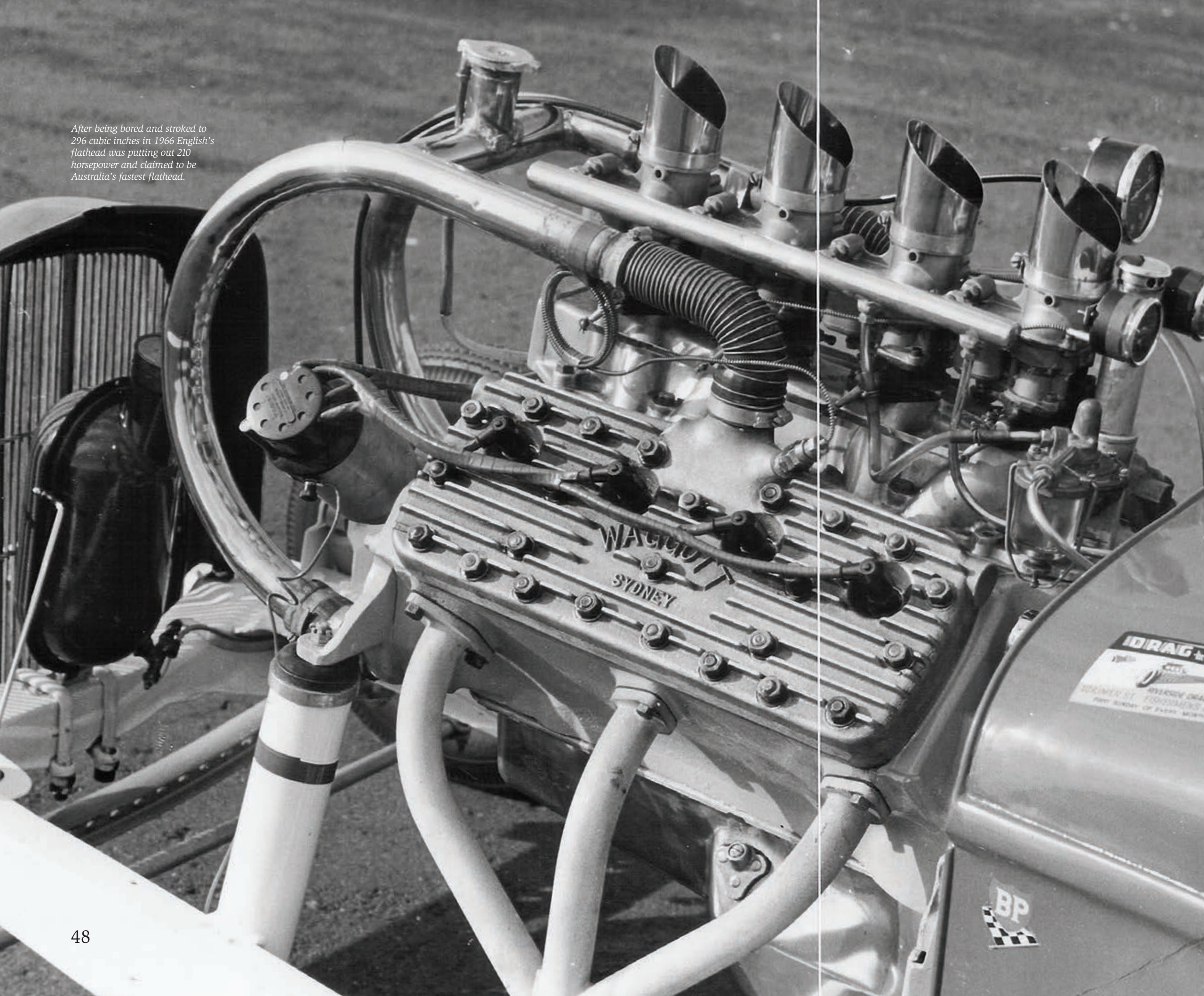
PASS MASTER

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

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