





# Slingin' Sand Across the Globe

## BEACH RACING COMES OF AGE

By Joey Ukrop | Photography by David Carlo and Michael Alan Ross

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**T**he idea of driving a stripped-down and souped-up car as fast as it will go out on a straight stretch of sand has been around almost as long as the automobile itself. Grudge matches, time trials, you name it; beaches have served as backdrops for everything from high-speed record runs to old-timey reunions countless times over the course of the past century. Although this type of racing is nearly as old as the automobile, new events continue to surface on beaches around the world. Last year, we saw the introduction of two races: California's Race of Gentlemen West and Denmark's Rømø Motor Festival.

Beach racing has become a movement as of late. It's deeply rooted in the mechanical world—our world—and holds fast to the almighty traditional aesthetic. The cars, the motorcycles, the structures, the advertising and even the participants' wardrobes all fit into that pre-/immediate postwar timeframe. They have to. The guidelines are strict—too strict for some—but for those who are involved, that's part of the appeal.

### TROG WEST

Beach racing may not be a novel concept, but you'd never guess it if you could hear all those ooohs, ahhs and cheers coming from Pismo Beach State Park on October 15, 2016. Walk through the crowd; push through the people wrapped in slickers and flannels and duck beneath wide-brimmed hats and umbrellas to get a closer look at what exactly has drawn these brave souls away from the warmth of their homes on this particularly damp fall day.

And then you see them. The cars—the stars—the main attractions. Roadsters and coupes chopped down and stripped of anything that may be deemed unnecessary. Their fenders, splash aprons, headlights and hoods have been sent to the heap or sold to buy parts that'll make them go faster. Some entries are painted

in bright yellows or reds, while others wear shades of rust or peeling black lacquer from decades ago.

One at a time, the rain-soaked drivers—the gentlemen, as they're called—peer out from their cockpits and follow the signal of the bearded man in an all-white ensemble. They bomb down the makeshift pit road, slide through the sand and bounce their way on to the beach. The cast is poised. The stage is set. The spectators move into position, ready for the action to unfold.

From the cars to the course to the rules, the Race of Gentlemen West was a collaboration between two very different guys living on opposite sides of the country. Let's start with Mel Stultz, the soft-spoken East Coaster who looks like a sea captain out of a 19th century novel. The rugged 46-year-old is heavily tattoo'd and has a thick beard that's white in some parts, brown in others. More often than not, he sports a short-brimmed motorcyclist's cap garnished with a golden rope and a winged wheel patch. Having spent his childhood on New Jersey's beaches, he's usually shoeless and always dreaming of the next big idea.

A self-proclaimed "jackass of all trades," Mel's the poster child for the burgeoning beach racing movement. He's also the man to know when it comes to music, prop production, vintage motorcycles, traditional hot rodding, or big ideas in general on the East Coast. For his latest endeavor, he's transforming a 1940s Boy Scout camp into an all-season venue for building and racing early style cars and motorcycles. Back in 2012, he launched his biggest idea—The Race of Gentlemen in Allenhurst, New Jersey. We told the full story in *TRJ* #59 and a cross-continental follow up appeared in *TRJ* #63.

Bobby Green, a California-based entrepreneur, was out on the beach as a spectator at the second race, and he was hooked. The smiling 45-year-old from Oklahoma is known for his signature newsboy hat, classic wardrobe and inherent ability to put a vintage-yet-authentic spin on every project he approaches.

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At first glimpse, it'd be easy to mistake this for a vintage photo. It was actually taken at Pismo State Beach during the first Race of Gentlemen West in the fall of 2016. Modern beach racing never fails to bring out an impressive field of early-style vehicles, like Steve Nelson's '27 Ford in the foreground. The Petaluma, California-based speedster runs a 190cid Ford four-cylinder equipped with a Roof OHV conversion.

To the automotive community, he's the proprietor of Old Crow Speed Shop in Burbank, California, and the mastermind behind the "Old Crow" belly tanker. Outside of our realm, he's the visionary who reintroduced pre-war styling cues into the Los Angeles bar scene. Over the past few years, he's built a network of watering holes with well-developed themes, artesian cocktails and thought-provoking names like Bigfoot West, Sassafras and La Cuevita. His recent projects have included saving a 1940s bar shaped like a big wooden barrel and revamping Los Angeles' oldest bowling alley.

Not long after Bobby and Mel met, Bobby joined the revitalized Oilers Car Club and the duo worked together to further develop beach racing on the East Coast. And even as the New Jersey event gained momentum, Bobby set his sights on California and started digging around. Through his research, he zeroed in on Pismo State Beach about three years ago.

Located about 200 miles up the coast from Los Angeles, Pismo has been a popular tourist destination since the late-1800s. Although there haven't been formal races on this 17-mile stretch of sand in more than half a century, the California Department of Parks and Recreation still permits driving on the beach—a rarity for Central California. Once they had their target, Bobby, Mel and the Oilers had to figure out how to make it work. "We presented the idea to the state parks mostly through email and a couple phone calls," Bobby says. "I think it was such a foreign thing to them that it took them a couple years to wrap their heads around it. I would continue to touch base; we sent a basket of flowers over once, and I sent them old photographs of Pismo Beach with racecars and motorcycles on it back in the '20s and '30s."

The folks in charge of Pismo kept an eye on TROG East as it matured on the other side of the country. In September 2015, things were looking bleak as Hurricane Joaquin hit the eastern seaboard and delayed the race a week. "We were really depressed, bummed out and kind of scrambling to postpone the event," Bobby says. "That weekend was the weekend we got the email from Pismo saying 'we can allow you to do this.' It was a neat silver lining."

Now that they had their beach, Bobby and Mel started putting the rest of the pieces into place. They soon discovered California and New Jersey had some very different ideas about what was and wasn't allowed. The mandates spanned the gamut, and Pismo even insisted that bird experts be stationed on the beach to make sure the speeding vehicles wouldn't harm any animals. "The requirements from the state and state parks and whatnot were growing daily, and I got to a point where I needed to bring in an event management company to help sort all this out," Bobby says. Even with the extra manpower, they spent four non-stop months preparing for October's race.

Designing and building props was one of the more enjoyable steps in the TROG preparation process. "The props basically have been my brainchild," Mel says. "I basically create events because I want to make cool props." Mel hand paints the canvasses every year, and he was responsible for the first version of the signature

red Oilers timing tower that's become a TROG landmark. "A few bulky things needed to be duplicated, but basically we just shipped most of the heart and soul of it over there and back," he says.

At TROG West, Bobby and Mel took extra steps to ensure the event would be exciting for spectators and participants alike. When it came to the vehicles, they upped the ante like never before. "We—the Oilers—go through and look for the cars and the bikes that we think are the fastest or the coolest or the most desirable," Mel says. "We hand choose them, and there was only so much room, so unfortunately some cars and bikes get cut." As a result, there were more carbs, more blowers, more chops and more purpose-built and historic cars than ever. On race day they had a total of 100 pre-1934 hot rods and pre-1947 motorcycles.

They also had rain. "There's literally a bad forecast every race," Bobby says, laughing. "It happened that this particular situation with Pismo was a lot worse than anyone really thought. I was more bummed that we couldn't make Sunday happen than having a rainy Saturday, because once the cars actually started running and all those thousands of people were standing there in the rain with big smiles on their face, it was fine. No one really cared about the rain at that point."

Due to the unusually high tide, TROG West was abbreviated into a one-day event. Still, Bobby estimates close to 8,000 spectators invaded the beach to catch a glimpse of the tire-spinning racing from a bygone era. "It was the kind of thing I equated with climbing Mt. Everest," he says. "Everybody that was there—everybody that raced and everybody who was a part of putting it on—was just so thrilled that it was even happening."

Bobby and Mel are both quick to admit TROG West was expensive to organize, and they're not sure if it'll happen again anytime soon. "I sure am proud of it," Mel says in retrospect. "It brings me to tears, often, because I get such an emotional pull from it. It's this thing that helps you connect with strangers and people that have great stories, and it's very hard to explain. You need to feel the electricity in your body...it's a pretty magical thing." We'll just have to wait and see what next year brings.

## RØMØ MOTOR FESTIVAL

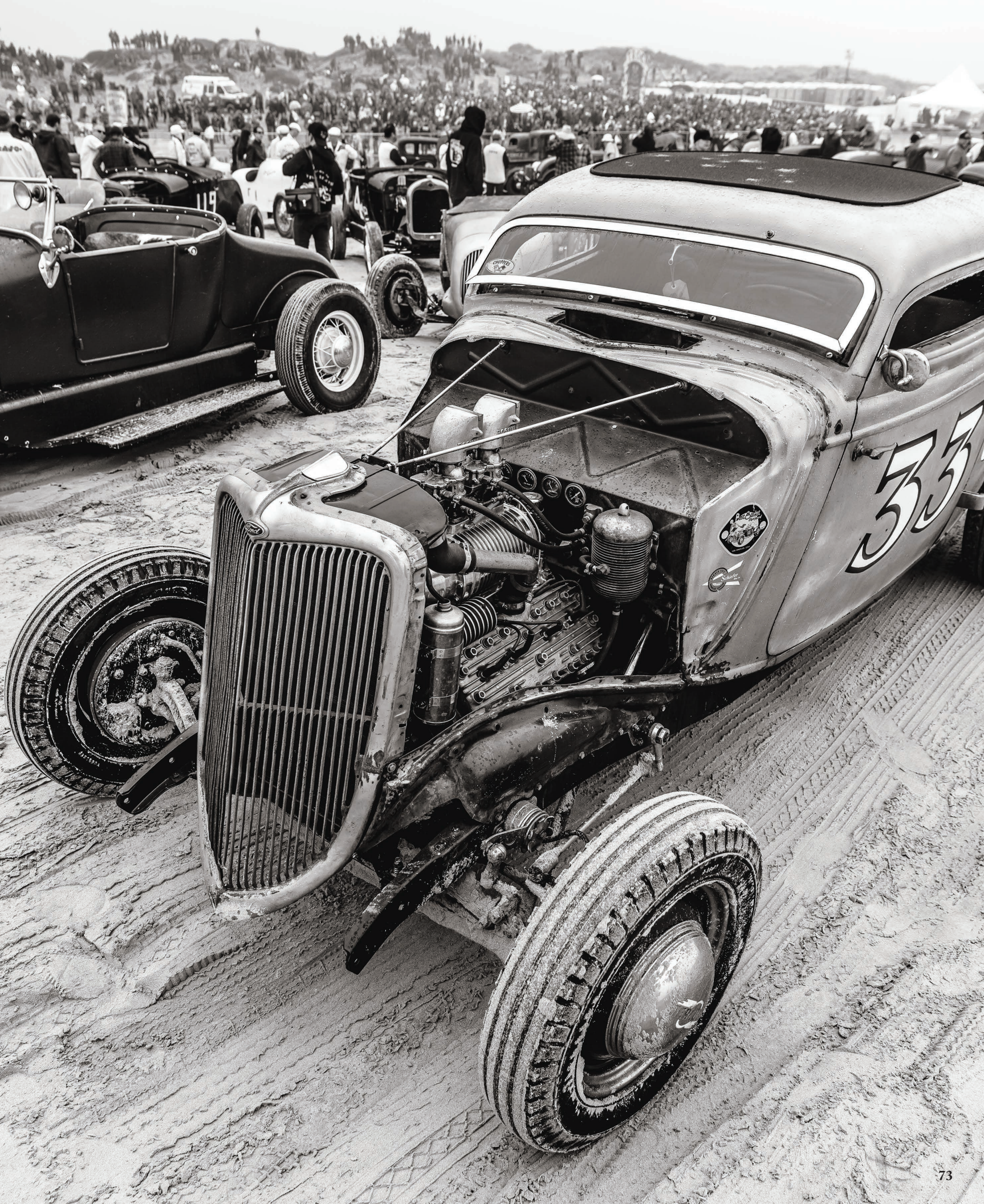
More than 5,000 miles away from Pismo, a tight-knit group of Danish hot rodders came together to host a traditional beach race on the island of Rømø. Located just off the coast of southern Denmark in the Wadden Sea, Rømø has a population of 650 and is known for its scenic Lakolk Strand, a flat, eight-mile stretch of sand along its western edge. It's here that Thomas Toft Bredahl, Finn Andersen, Holger Sonnberg, Steffen Sonnberg and Carsten Bech decided to hold the first Rømø Motor Festival on September 9th-11th, 2016.

Back in the late teens and early-'20s, speed trials were organized on the neighboring island of Fanø. The ideal surface attracted participants from all over Europe, and Fanø's beaches acted as one of Denmark's premier automotive test beds. Although the action only lasted a few years for safety reasons, tales of those early races inspired a new generation of hot rodders to get to the beach.

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Burbank Choppers member Verne Hammond's '34 Ford three-window has been a staple of the Southern California hot rodding scene for decades. Vern installed a supercharger on the 235cid flathead for the inaugural running of TROG West. To the left of the coupe's windshield you can see the beautifully formed track nose on Pat Lash's '29 Ford roadster amidst a sea of interesting machinery. We featured the GMC six-powered Model A back in *TRJ* #26.







The RMF team contemplated bringing the racing back to Fanø, but it would be logistically challenging since it's only accessible by ferry. Instead, they looked to Rømø, which is connected to the mainland via bridge. "Having a better beach than the one on Fanø, it was a no brainer," Thomas Toft Bredahl says. "But getting the permits was another deal completely. Danes are inherently environmentally friendly, and they don't want to see any old cars raced on the beaches."

Close to eight years after they first dreamed of revitalizing Danish beach racing, a conversation with a governing official at a neighborhood gas station kicked things into high gear. "All of a sudden it came about," Thomas says. With their paperwork in check, the RMF team got to work. Finn, Holger and Steffen organized the parties and campsite for the weekend, while Carsten and Thomas managed the racing. Registration filled up quickly with submissions from Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany. Even though many of the entries were hot rods, Thomas noted that they weren't the sole focus. "It was important for us to showcase whatever would have raced back in the day here in mainland Europe," he says. Speedsters, specials and vintage motorcycles were welcomed with open arms.


On Saturday, September 10th, a total of 38 vintage cars and bikes raced all day as approximately 6,000 spectators cheered them on. The weather was warm and the wind held off, making for some excellent conditions. Cars raced cars, bikes raced bikes and there were even a number of bike-versus-car matchups. "We just wanted to give them an open playground," he says. "We tried to pair them up for the first eight or 10 races, then they could make up their own minds." Some cars made as many as 20 passes down Rømø's 1/8th-mile straightaway.

As the racing wound down and the participants returned to the campground for the send-off party, the RMF team had already started planning next year's event. Thomas says the festival went much smoother than they expected, and they hope to double the vehicle count from 40 to 80 in 2017.

Their hard work in 2016 earned them a finalist slot for "Motoring Event of the Year" hosted by the International Historic Motoring Awards: quite the accomplishment for a brand new race. Although they didn't win this time, you can be certain that full-throttle racing will be the main attraction on Rømø again soon—just like it was on Fanø nearly a century prior.

## STATE OF THE BEACH

Even though they're separated by thousands of miles, the Race of Gentlemen West and the Rømø Motor Festival give us a clear view of the current state of beach racing. The cars and motorcycles are faster (and more authentic) than ever. Dedicated spectators and racers endured inclement weather and long-distance travel so that they could hit the beach to become a part of history in the making. They're certainly not alone. Races have popped up in Chirihama, Japan, and they're continuing to thrive on Pendine Sands in Wales and other beaches across the globe.

It all makes sense. We live in a time where beach racing has the opportunity to grow—and it's doing just that. It has captivated fans young and old, near and far. The rooster tails and rapping pipes of this new era are indeed stoking the traditional hot rod flame. Call it regression, call it progress, but the way we see it, beach racing has simply come of age. 

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Mike Barillaro storms across the finish line in his swoopy "555" belly tanker as the Pacific tides roll in. He and his brother Jim operate Barillaro Speed Emporium in Knoxville, Tennessee, and they built the tank specifically to race at TROG East back in 2015. After running the car at Pismo, Mike sold it to noted collector Tom McIntyre of Burbank, California.

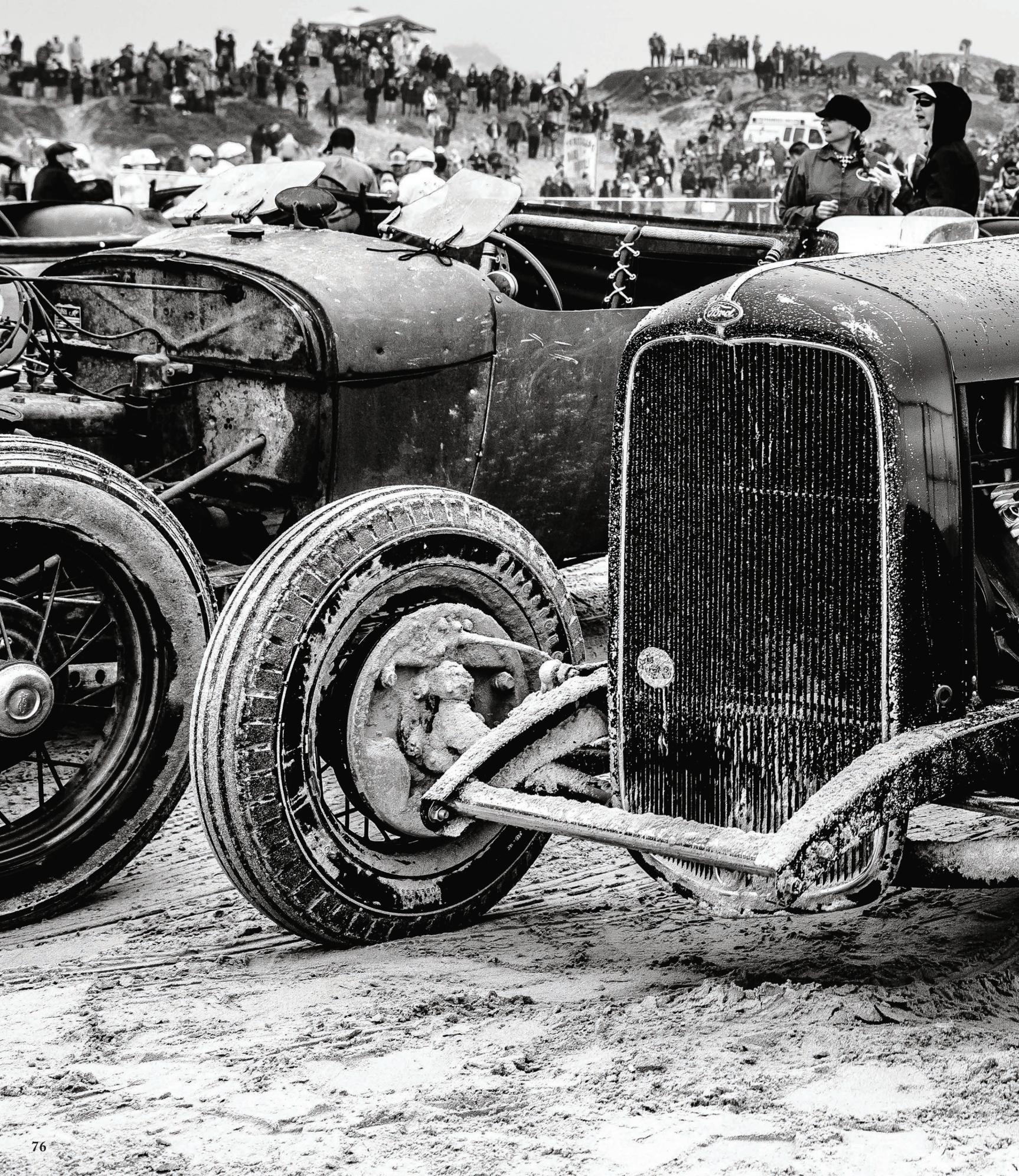






The cars entering the pits made for some exciting moments for spectators and racers alike. Mike Barillaro had no problem drifting through the soft sand in his flathead-powered belly tanker. James "The Bronx Kid" McCormack of Placerville, California, really dug in with his chopped '33 Ford five-window.



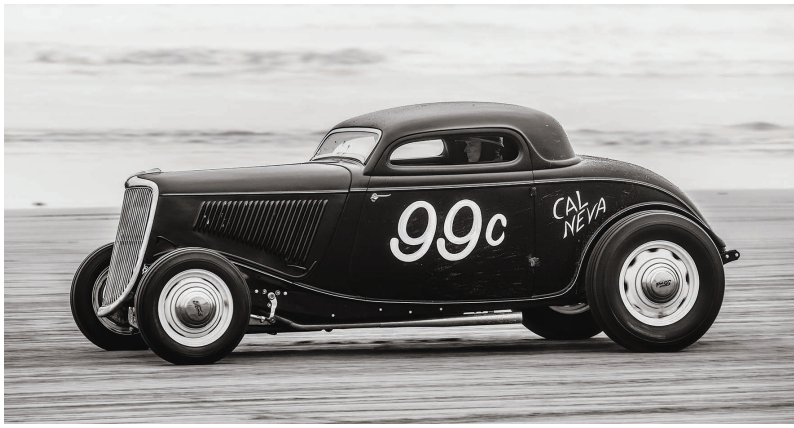






Although the name of the event is The Race of Gentlemen, ladies often compete too. Templeton, California, hot rodder Katie Hill took to the beach in her '27 T roadster with a souped up flathead and Deuce grille shell. This photo highlights not only the authenticity of the cars, but also the sheer number of spectators lining the dunes that overlook the beach.

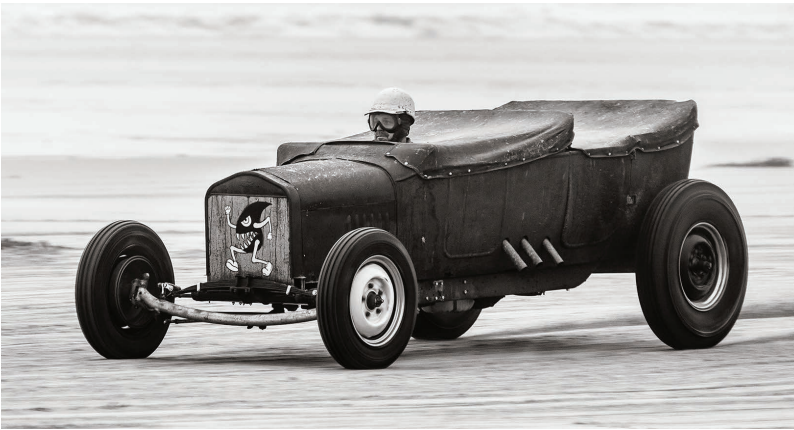




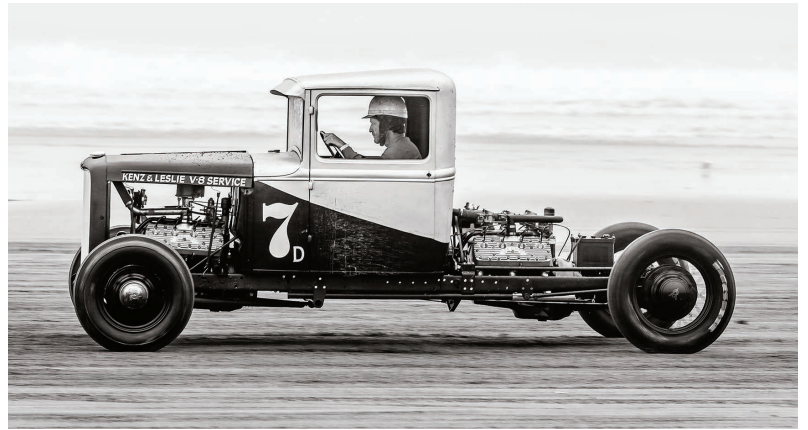
Mike Hamel, a member of the Peckerheads Car Club, brought his lakes-style '33 Ford to The Race of Gentlemen from Reno, Nevada. The heavily chopped three-window runs a 239cid flathead beneath its '34 front sheet metal.



Even the support vehicles fit within the stringent guidelines. Mike Detwiler, owner of The Forge in Loveland, Colorado, was responsible for grooming the racecourse in his perfectly patina'd Deuce pickup. The Forge, formerly known as Dave Crouse's Custom Auto, has restored a number of historical hot rods since the mid-'90s—the most recent being Ed Pink's '36 Ford coupe.



One of the more inventive TROG entries was raced by Oilers Car Club member Jeremy Baye of 1945 Speed and Custom. Jeremy combined a '22 Model T touring body, shortened '27 Essex frame and Ford flathead to create this mid-engined marvel. After thrashing to build the car in a matter of weeks, he made the mad dash to Pismo from his home in New York.



Duane Helms of Denver, Colorado, spent more than a decade collecting parts for his recreation of the Kenz & Leslie "Odd Rod." With the help of Mike Nicholas, the dual-flathead-powered Model A pickup was finished just in time for TROG West. Below, Justin Brunmeier squares his '32 three-window up against Dick DeLuna's '34 Ford.





# Romo Motor Festival









Danish hot rodder Morten Høybye builds speed at Rømø in his Model A Phaeton (left). Prior to installing the tub body, Morten had a roadster pickup body on the Deuce chassis. Motivation comes from a dual-carbed 239cid flathead.

Kim Ketil is also from Denmark, and he assembled his '33 Ford (right) in a mere two weeks back in 2004. From the chopped windshield and folding top to the beautifully weathered paint, the all-steel roadster has an undeniably traditional appearance.

The motorcycle-versus-car showdowns never failed to entertain at the Rømø Motor Festival (left). Here Søren Carstens of the White Knuckles Motor Club goes up against Craig Callum's banger-powered Model A coupe. Søren's 1940 WLC was one of several vintage Harleys in competition.

Sebastian Attenberger kicks up some sand in his chopped and channeled Model A coupe (right). The low-slung '30 features a 3x2-fed German G29T flathead underneath its liberally louvered hood. Sebastian hails from Kaufering, Germany.







The RMF organizers worked to make sure the cars were evenly matched for the first couple of runs, which resulted in some close races. Here Mikael Johansson (left) of Halmstad, Sweden, rips down the beach in his chopped Model A cabriolet with a 290cid flathead.

Mike Johansson's '32 Ford roadster (right) could have rolled off the California dry lakes circa 1940. The all-black Deuce has a timeless look, and no piece is newer than 1939. Mike is a member of both the A-Bombers and the Roadster Club Scandinavia.







This is the essence of Rømø: big crowds, beautiful conditions and two early-style roadsters going head-to-head as the flag drops. Mikael Carlsen is in the near lane in his '27 T with a Winfield-equipped four-banger, while Niels Mylin prepares to launch in his '31 Chevy. Niels is 25 years old, which made him the youngest racer at Rømø.

