

FUTURE OF RACING?

ELECTRONIC FUEL INJECTION

PETERSEN'S

JUNE 1986 \$2.75

CIRCLE TRACK

SUPER TECH!

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- **CHASSIS GUSSETING TECH**
- **ON-BOARD FIRE SYSTEMS**

**ENGINE PROFILE:
THE MIDGET OFFY**

DAYTONA SPEEDWEEKS ACTION

THE BIG WINNERS: BODINE & EARNHARDT



Coupes, Flathead, and Heroes.

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY:
MICHAEL J. MARRER

IT WAS A TIME FOR HEROES, when a child would make a bee-line straight for the pits at the feature's end. In awe of the driver in the dust-covered T-shirt, he asked for nothing more than the chance to stand close to his idol, or perhaps to get an autograph on the scrap of paper he held tightly clenched in his fist. When signed, it became a relic that would carry his memories through the approaching long, cold, winter months.

Friends, relatives, and whole communities would fill the benches at tracks carved out of former cow pastures. The tracks had names such as Penn-Can, Five Mile Point, Brookfield, and White Lake. The objects of their attention were three- and five-window coupes and coaches, powered by venerable Ford flatheads and Chevy straight sixes.

It was a time when a driver's chances of winning were determined more by his bravery and skill and less by the size of his wallet. An era when the sport of Stock car racing was described by words such as "fun."

It was also the summer of 1985.

The spirit of Stock car racing's formative years has not been lost, due in part to groups such as the Mid-State

Antique Stock Car Club. Providing both education and entertainment, this group has appeared regularly at tracks throughout New York state since its inception in June of 1984.

Membership in the club has risen to well over a dozen vehicles so far. Other restorers have traveled from as far away as New Hampshire to run at club-sponsored events. The appearances are usually scheduled once or twice a month, and are run only on dirt.

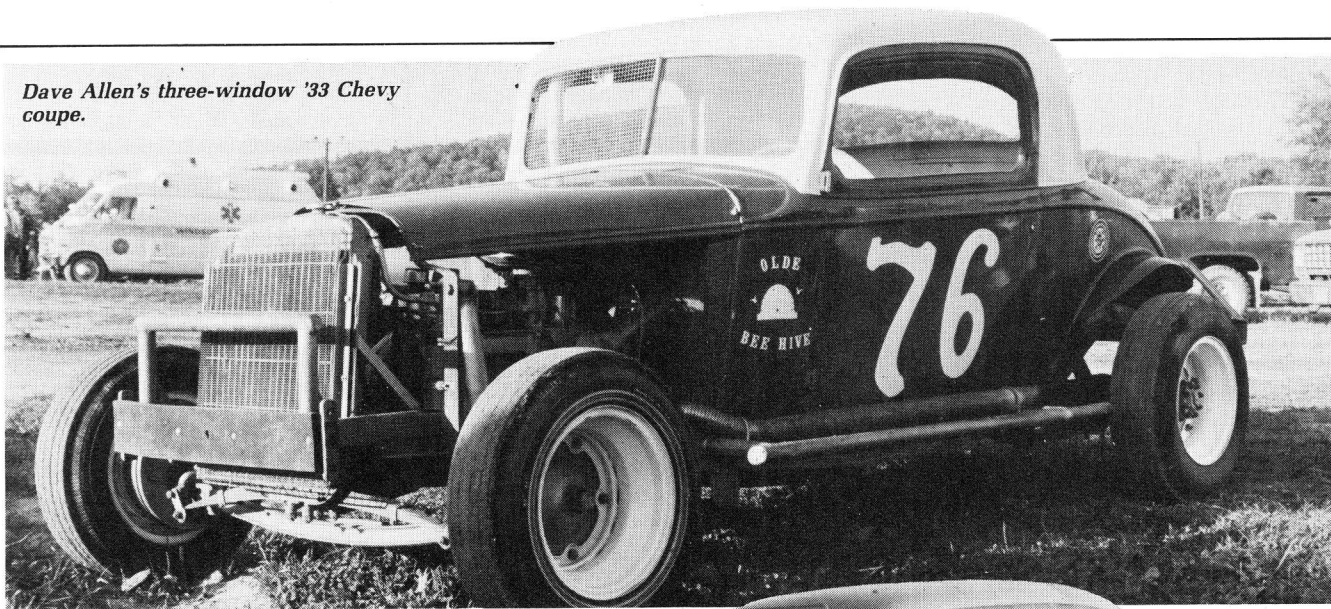
Requirements for club membership specify that the car must have raced in the Fifties or early Sixties, with the engines limited to Ford flatheads and Chevy sixes. Some updating is allowed for safety reasons or for accessibility of later parts.

When the club shows up at a track, the cars are not set up for display purposes only. Remembering that these were originally *race* cars, the club runs a program of heats and features where their vehicles are driven at near competition speeds. Trophies are awarded at each event, and a point system has also been instituted this season.

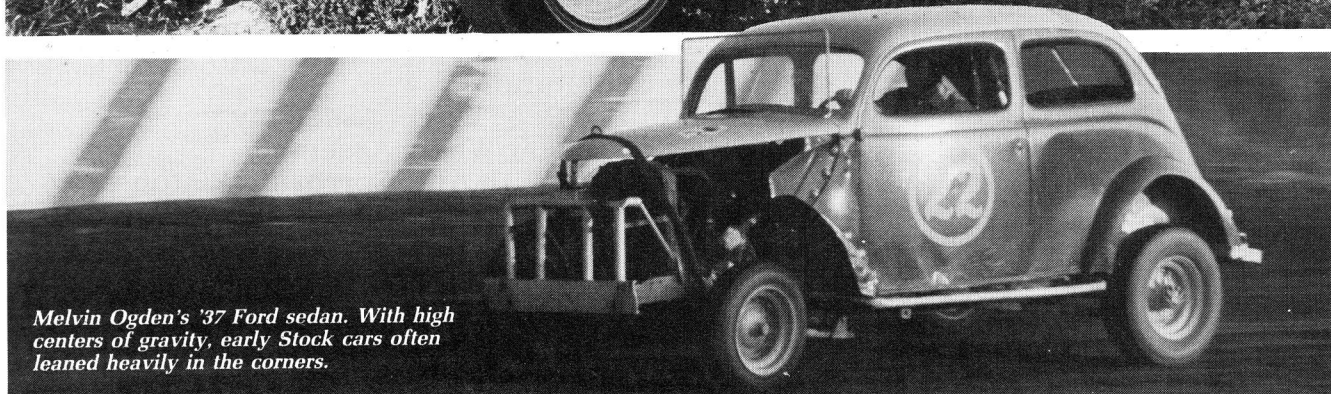
Restoration of an antique Stock car involves much more than mechanical ability. It also requires playing detective, tracking down leads on cars and

The Way We Were

Dave Allen's three-window '33 Chevy coupe.



Melvin Ogden's '37 Ford sedan. With high centers of gravity, early Stock cars often leaned heavily in the corners.



The Way We Were

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parts in old barns, junkyards, and back fields. There is a lot of history in each of these old cars, and each has a very special story to tell. Two in the club are featured here.

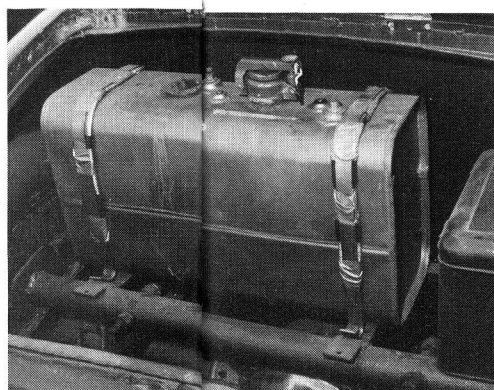
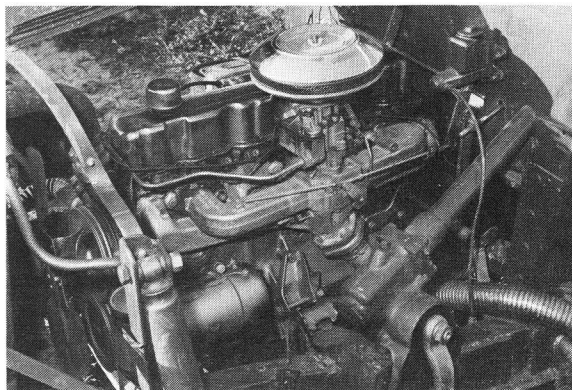
Dave Allen was too young to race

when he started building and owning race cars in the Sixties. His '33 Chevy Coupe bears the #76 that he used in those days, but the car has had several other numbers in its life.

It began in the late Fifties as #166,

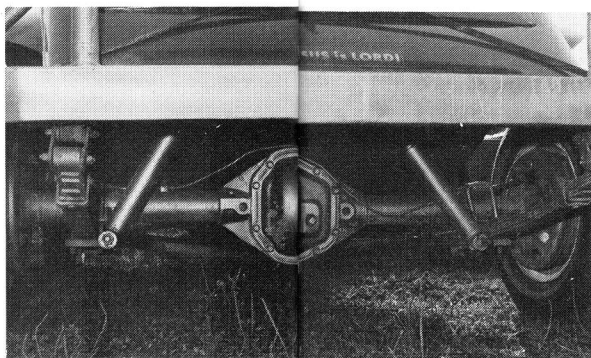
driven at Penn-Can (Susquehanna, Pennsylvania) by Johnny Allen (no relation). In the early Sixties, it came into the hands of Jack Gill who ran it as a team car to Pete Cordes. The now #89 was credited with several feature wins at Morris, and was parked after the '66 season. By the time Allen found it, the whole bottom of the frame had rusted out. Much welding was necessary in order to revive the frame, which once belonged to a '40 Chevy. (CONTINUED)

Allen's 250-cubic-inch Chevy six.



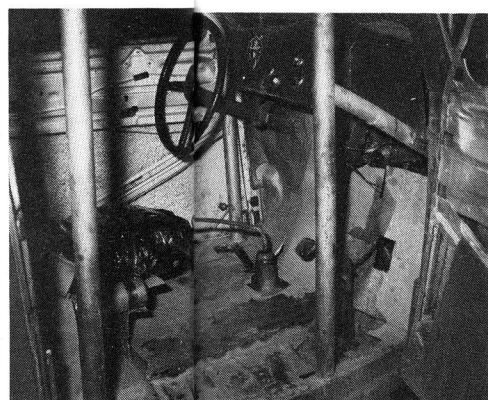
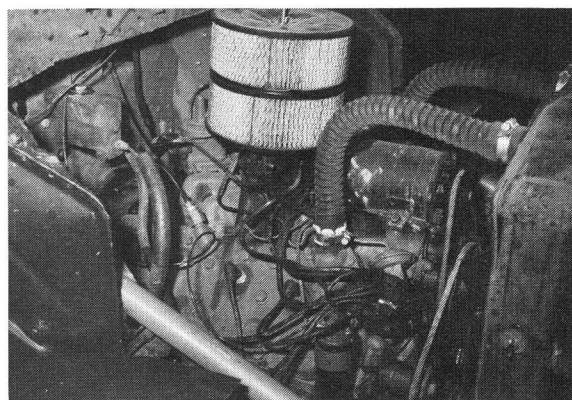
Before the invention of fuel cells, just about any type of container could be used as a gas tank.

Driver protection sufficed with a single side bar in the roll cage. Side supports were welded on to the delivery van seat.



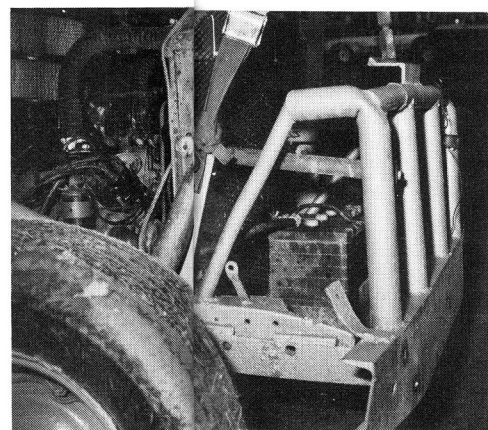
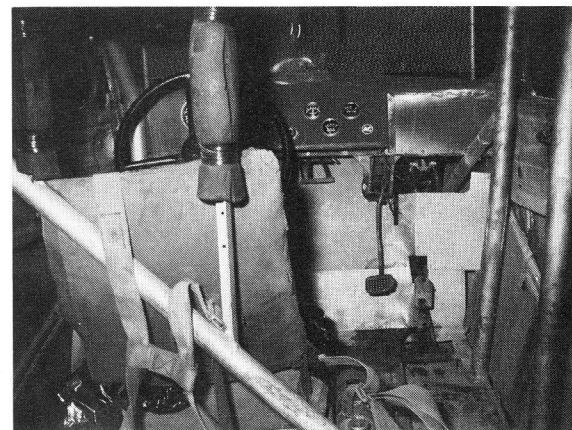
The rearend consists of a floater axle and Ford 1-ton truck front springs.

Butcher ran Ogden's Ford with two air cleaners stacked on the flathead engine.



Although the driver door is welded shut, the car features an operating passenger door.

Note the position of the pedals and seat, which causes the driver to sit angled into the car.



Butcher mounted the battery up front for convenience.

The Way We Were

CONTINUED

The front suspension consists of a '39-'40 Ford front axle. The wishbone has been split and brought out to the side of the frame. This gave clearance for the oil pan, and it was also felt that it gave the car added stability.

In a typical Fifties style, safety hubs were only used on the right front. These came off '38-'39 Ford pickup trucks, being that they were the only vehicles that had them. The left front is a '39 Ford standard brake drum and spindle. Wheels are 15-inch Buicks with '36 Ford centers that are offset and welded in place.

The rear springs, original to the car, are early '50 Ford 1-ton truck front springs. Taking advantage of the safety axles that are available, a later model Dodge or Ford ¾-ton floater replaced the Olds locked rearend that was used in competition.

The steering unit is from a '49-'54 GMC pickup truck. Typical of that era in racing, the pitman arm runs to the left front. Power is supplied by a Chevy 250-cubic-inch six.

The roll cage has been cleaned up, for safety's sake. All of the welds have been redone and gusseted, and there is more padding now than there ever was. Driver protection in that era was limited, with only one horizontal brace bar in use.

The driver's seat came out of a delivery van. Side supports were welded on so that the driver would not fall out on the corners. This car, like most Chevys of that era, has the doors welded shut. Unlike the Fords, Detroit built the early Chevys with wood framing, and the doors were usually the first thing on the body to go.

The rear fenders were bobbed and the car never had fenders up front. Crude metal along the side of the body served as nerf bars. The clearance lights around the rear window were used when it was tow-barred to and from the track. The trunk contains a typical 12-gallon capacity gas tank.

The dash is equipped with oil pressure, heat, and ammeter gauges. A speedometer was added for cosmetic purposes. Primarily as a modern convenience, a generator has also been added.

ITS LAST BATTLE WAS ON THE LOSING end of a bout with a wall. For the next 21 years it sat in a junkyard, slowly sinking up to its axles in mud.

For Melvin Ogden, it was love at first sight.

What he fell in love with was a '37 Ford two-door sedan, last campaigned by '58 Five Mile Point track champion Bobby Butcher. Butcher operated a gas station and used car lot in Downsville, New York, and was active in racing throughout the Fifties. When his brother-in-law, Paul Doig, decided to go racing, Butcher pulled the Ford off the car lot and converted it for racing. Labeled as the Circle 2, Doig ran it as a team car with Butcher throughout the '57 season.

When Doig got out of the venture the following year, Butcher took over the car and renumbered it with his own Circle 22. The coach ran until 1963 when a blown engine caused a head-on crash into the fourth turn wall. The impact bent the frame and completely wiped out the front end. It sat untouched in a junkyard until 1984, when Ogden found it. All that was left was the body, frame, and rearend.

The drivetrain Ogden put in starts with a stock '53 Mercury flathead, uses a '48 Ford truck transmission, and ends with a '48-'51 Ford ¾-ton truck rearend suspension. The front suspension is a stock '37 Ford. The wheels were built by Butcher, and consist of Buick rims with 16-inch Ford centers.

With the pedals on the right side of the car and the seat positioned at an angle, Butcher could look straight ahead when sliding through the corners. The positioning also caused the driver to be forced back into the seat, instead of against the door. The driver's door was welded shut, but the passenger's side was left operational.

In 1963, Butcher was one of the first to begin experimenting with setting the motors further back in order to shift the center of gravity of the car. With the old setup, flexible pipe directed the exhaust from the headers to pipes mounted in the front fenders. In the set-back position, Butcher couldn't get the pipe to bend enough to reach the fenders, so the headers blew directly out onto the ground. The former exhaust ports were left in the fenders.

These cars harken back to a day when most tracks were run not by national sanctioning bodies, but by local clubs. Both racers bear the marks of their respective organizations. Allen's car is labeled SCSCC for the Susquehanna County Stock Car Club, while Ogden's is branded with the STSCC label (Southern Tier Stock Car Club).

Looking at these cars, there is no mistaking them for museum pieces. But they are a true picture of the look and feel of the growing years of Stock car racing, and were the backbone of the sport. They also illustrate the great strides that have taken place in driver safety over the past two decades. **O**