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GASPER GOSPIP



The Original Darkhorse

By Chuck Finders

as told to Joe Andulics

Foreword

Late January 1964, Inyokern Drag Strip, high in the California desert, the stage is set to settle once and for all who's the World's Fastest Street Machine. Will it be the team of Stone, Woods and Cook or the '41 Willys of "Big John" Mazmanian?

This would not be the first time these two teams had been matched against one another. January 12th at Pomona, the candy apple red '41 Willys of "Big John", driven by Bones Balough, would haze the track with a very fine run of 10.00, 144.46 mph. The car was running a supercharged 467 Chrysler, Hilborn injectors, Isky camshaft, B&M hydro stick and Mondello heads.

The S-W-C sky blue '41 Willys "Swindler A" was powered by a blown and injected 467 cubic inch Oldsmobile, Engle cam and Mondello heads, hooked to a B&M hydromatic transmission and weighing in at 2,900 pounds. The car held both ends of the Drag News 1320 A/GS record at 9.95, 145.16 and half of the NHRA mark with a 140.84 top speed.

That day at Pomona though, the S-W-C entry would never make it to the line due to mechanical difficulties. The next week in *Drag News*, an Isky ad headlined "Amazing Mazmanian A/GS coupe mesmerizes Pomona faithful".

In the rematch two weeks later at Inyokern, the red Willys of "Big John" would come off the trailer first with a check out run of 10.81, 140.40 mph. S-W-C followed with a 10.86, 129.68 mph.

Both cars would want another single run before the actual match race. Mazmanian replied with a new Inyokern track record of 10.68, 141.06. S-W-C's next move proved to be disastrous, they turned a 13.59 at 89.64 mph. As the match race approached Tim Woods asked for another single run, but at half track something went amiss and the car

slowed to a 11.21, 108.69. Back at the pit an inspection revealed that there was a hole in the pan and rocker cover of the 400 inch Olds. Track reporter Dick MaHan described it as "what a mess; broken rockers, cams and all...they felt so bad about breaking their toy, they went off without their share of the match money."

This isn't where the story ends, the 400 inch Olds was not in the "Swindler A" driven by Doug Cook, but in the '33 Willys coupe the "Darkhorse" of Chuck Finders. This is only where the real story begins.

Southern California

A warm 1958 evening in Artesia, California finds a high school student working two part time jobs, one till 2:00 a.m., awaiting the opportunity to break into the ranks of the increasingly popular supercharged coupes and sedans. Chuck Finders' change comes when he teams up with Bill Altizer and his son-in-law Neal Kibbler. Chuck owns a red 1930 Model A sedan in which they drop a "monster" 322 cubic inch flathead owned by Bill. The stroked and bored flathead runs the more common speed equipment with the exception of the early Moldex crank and the Scott supercharger, later replaced with a GMC 4-71 with 6 Stromberg 97's perched on top, for "more power". Neal handles the driving.

For two days, on their way to the NHRA Nationals in Oklahoma, they "flat tow" the car behind a '53 Ford station wagon, living on hard bread and Armenian string cheese. Friday and Saturday of the race find them holding the A/GS supercharged record. Sunday, during the finals they square off against the '34 Plymouth of Charlie Aten with its' blown hemi. Coming off the line strong, the 4:88 gears break the always "too narrow" tires loose, losing the championship.

Racing that same weekend is the Kurtis A/MSP sports car of Sam Parriott, with its blown Cadillac motor. Both Neal and Bill share an interest in the supercharged sports cars and find their attention drift from the bigger coupes and sedans. Racing the Model A for a short period after, Chuck strikes out on his own and the Model A becomes a street rod cruising the streets of California.

Finding a '37 Chevy, an Olds motor is initially installed. Having little luck with the Olds, it's yanked and replaced with a small block Chevy motor from the

junkyard. With a basically stock motor Bill Altizer loans him, a 6-71 blower and he adds enough weight to the car to keep it B/G supercharged legal.

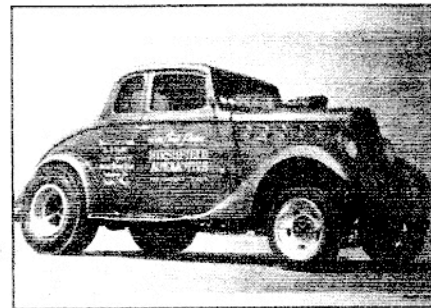
At Lions Dragstrip during an NHRA event, he's matched against the current C/GS 13.20 record holder Palmer & Albert in their Olds powered 56 Olds. Without ever "getting the car into high gear" Chuck beats the Olds. Unfortunately, there's a controversy overshadowing the win, as to the actual displacement of the Chevy motor, he loses the dispute. Car and motor eventually part their way.

..... car runs without brakes

Next a '38 four door Willys sedan is found and with members of the Drifters Car Club of LaMirada, they install the "junk yard" Chevy motor. In building the car Chuck needs to cut and reweld the brake pedal for clearance. At Fontana, the weld on the brake pedal breaks, for three rounds the car runs without brakes with the club members hanging on at the line and letting go to launch the sedan. To stop, he "simply" down shifts to slow the car. The car understandably gets "trashed".

The early '60's finds him with a B/G '40 Willys powered by an Olds motor and backed with a hydromatic. The car is a "mutt", as best described by Chuck. With little extra cash to spend to build it fast, he "gives" the car to Junior Thompson.

Junior used the small block Chevy out of his current '40 Studebaker sedan, and adds enough weight to the car to make it C/G legal. By running C/G he avoids racing against the likes of current B/G drivers, K.S. Pittman, Stone-Woods-Cook, "Big John" Mazmanian, the Airoso brothers and the Panella Trucking team. Junior "hates to lose", reminisces Chuck.



At Long Beach, a week before the Indy Nationals, Junior's car runs faster and quicker than the current NHRA record, but Junior decides not to go to Indy.

Five weeks before the 1962 Winter-nationals, Chuck decides to build a new car for the torrid A/GS supercharged class. He completes the body and chassis of a '35 Willys coupe, while Hirshfield Automotive of Paramount, builds the engine.

Howards Cam, a frequent sponsor supplies the 195 roller cam and lifters, 1/2" stroker crank and forged aluminum rods to the now 482 cubic inch '62 Dodge hemi. A set of Smith Brothers push rods operate Gotha rockers. Scott injectors feed through a GMC 6-71 blower and Weiland manifold. A Bomar magneto supplies the spark.

Painted a candy apple blue, the interior sports black Tijuana naugahyde aircraft bucket seats. The hemi is backed by the ever present B&M racing hydro. American Racing mag wheels mount M&H Racemasters at the rear with Halibrand mags and Pirelli's up front. A Ford truck rear end is fitted with 4:11 gears, late Pontiac hydraulic brakes. The safety hubs, traction masters and headers are Chuck's design.

The joint effort was enough to take their class and set a new A/GS record. At Pomona, the car would run a 10.80, 126.76, Doug Cook would run a 10.72, 121.78 in B/GS and K.S. Pittman would run 12.10, 108.56 in C/GS.

The eventual fate of the racer is unclear. Chuck recalls "flat towing" the car and having the rear end tear loose damaging the rear quarter panels. In those days "it was cheaper to find another body than have to pay for the bodywork". Another coupe is eventually bought for \$200 and driven home.

Following is a B/GS '39 Willys pickup with a fiberglass front end, and for the first time an "illegal" full box tube frame at a National event. The cobalt blue car is built with the help of two friends, Dwight Watson and Bob Casper and lettered in shoe polish to look "like the big guys". The car is built in two weeks just in time for the '63 Winter-nationals, except for the required seat upholstery. A rag is taped around the seat buckets and spray painted to imitate the necessary upholstery. The car would see K.S. Pittman winning the B/GS event with a 131.90 mph and a 10.42.

At Irwindale the little blue truck would cause Tim Woods so much worry "that he chewed his gum so hard and fast he could barely keep it in his mouth". Still wanting to go quicker and faster the car is sold to Dick Burquous, Jim Shores and Earl Wade who run it as an unblown B/G.

With the '33 Willys coupe, Chuck's

new partner is Junior Thompson's brother, Ed "The Snake". Powered by an injected, 5/8" stroked small block Chevy, at the Half Moon Championship the car sets the A/G record with 129.87 mph and wins the championship with a 11.60, 119.20 mph run. The best the car would eventually run would be 132.35 mph, 10.68.

Not one to avoid controversy, at the Half Moon race, he and Ed need to add a missing grille to the coupes' front end. A Coors beer sign worked nicely under the Moon tank.



On the way back from the Half Moon race, they stop at the Yucca Valley gas/sedan/coupe championship where they beat the local favorite Chuck Poole for the championship. The local fans become so irate over Poole's loss and the loss of their bets that Chuck and Ed eventually need the help of the local police to leave the track.

The motor finally gets yanked out of the little coupe and the body and chassis stored. Ed and Chuck go their separate ways.

Chuck and Dave Braskett would team up off and on throughout the '60's, once with a B/GS '40 Willys coupe originally powered by Dave's small block Chevy, then later by a blown Chrysler hemi. The car would go on to win a Mickey Thompson's Speed/Boat show.

I just wanted to go fast. . .

An A/GS '33 Willys pickup with a 5/8" stroked Chevy was soon to follow. Initially known as the Cal Auto Special, the car was built with an "exhaust tube" roll bar. "I wasn't worried about rolling the car, I just wanted to go fast", Chuck relates. The truck weighs only about 1,580 pounds, with an open driveshaft quick change built by Henry's machine shop and a gray primer paint job. The Chevy motor doesn't last long as a result of his quest to "go fast".

The hemi engine from the Finder's/Braskett '40 coupe is transplanted to the pickup. New motor, new paint job, but unfortunately the painter neglects to paint the sponsors

name on the car, Tex Collins of Cal Automotive. With the help of the local police, Tex repossess the car from Chuck's shop. The body finds its way back to Nick Mayer in Cleveland, Ohio.

Tex eventually meets a horrible gunshot death and years later Chuck finds himself the owner of the Cal Auto fiberglass molds for the '33 Willys coupe.

Ron Bizio, of Southern California becomes the eventual owner of the pickup. Adding his blown Chrysler hemi, the car is campaigned shortly then sold, only to find itself eventually beautifully restored and on the track again in the '90's.



There would be a number of other cars built for himself during the '60's, some more descriptive than others, but by now Chuck's reputation had grown as a race car builder. He would build or help build, Jack "The Bear" Coonrod's '33 Willys, the first supercharged coupe to run 160 mph, the Zeller Bros. car, Junior Thompson's Austin, Steve Korney's "Gold Finger".

If a car of his own wasn't available you could easily find him driving someone else's. C & O Auto's '40 Willys pickup the "Agitator", Junior Thompson's Austin, Altizer's sports car, Mickey Hart's '33 Willys, "Big" Wilson's Austin, the "Spear Chucker", "Fantasia" the AA fuel altered of "Day & Night Towing" powered by a motor from Chet Herbert's top fuel dragster.



The best and the worst was yet to come!

(To Be Continued In Next Issue)