



# Wild, wild, WILDWOOD

AT THE RACE OF GENTLEMEN IN WILDWOOD,  
NEW JERSEY, LIFE'S A BEACH

STORY & PHOTOS MATT REEKIE





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01 Kevin Colburn travelled six days across great prairies from Grants, New Mexico to race his 8BA flathead-powered '31 Model A coupe, which required running repairs due to iffy ignition. "I dug this car out of a ditch in 2007," said Kev, who chopped the roof 7in and threw it all together in his two-car garage

02 TROG regular Andrew Rosen from Bensalem, Pennsylvania peered out from deep inside his '32 Auburn Speedster, which runs the original Lycoming straight-eight and three-speed combo. "The car was pulled out of a junkyard where it had been since World War II," Andrew said. "A friend of mine was going to restore it but never got to it, so I traded him some cars for it and built this race car"

03 The only bellytanker at the event was raced by twin brothers Jim and Mike Barillaro of Knoxville, Tennessee. Based on and around a narrowed Model T chassis, it's powered by a flathead with Edelbrock aluminium heads and twin Stromberg 97s. The Barillaros actually sold the car in 2018, but its new owner was kind enough to loan it to the bros for TROG '21

04 Cedric Meeks has made his already cool channelled '34 even cooler thanks to an aggro chop job and a 235ci Chev six with a Wayne 12-port head. "The acrylic hood was a compromise," Cedric explained. "My wife wanted me to put a hood on it, but I said, 'I've waited for a motor like that since I was in junior high and I'm not covering it up!'"



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THE EIGHTH-MILE RACE TRACK IS SET UP ALONG THE SHORELINE WITH THE ATLANTIC OCEAN AS THE BACKDROP



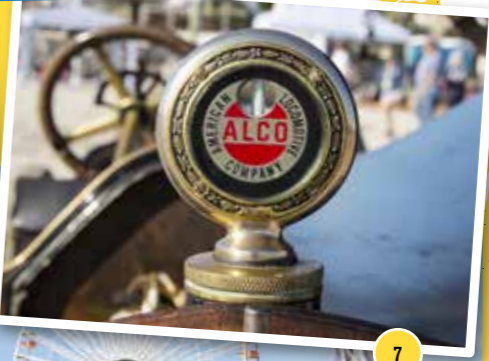
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**Y**OU'VE probably heard of The Race Of Gentlemen, aka TROG, where they race hot rods and vintage motorbikes on a beach in New Jersey; where nostalgic attendees dress up in all the retro gear; and where voodoo rock 'n' bands play by bonfires on the sand at night. But you may not know much about Wildwood, the cute little resort village that provides the setting for it all. Getting to experience the town is part of the enjoyment of attending TROG, and even more so if you're trekking over from Australia because we don't really do holiday spots quite like this. So let me tell you a little about Wildwood. It's a three-hour drive from New York, if you only stop at one diner along the way. A place

for working-class families to vacation in the summertime, there's no such thing as a five-star hotel here. Instead, it's full of nicely preserved mid-century motels, slathered in pastels and bathed in neon. They're not overly flashy, but neither are they costly, and most of them have pools. Running parallel to the long, wide beach is a boardwalk packed with games parlours, unhealthy food and bootleg TROG T-shirts. Shooting off the boardwalk toward the beach are various piers with carnival rides, water slides and other amusements of varying sketchiness. The entrance to TROG is situated along one of these piers. You walk just beyond the Ferris wheel, along a jagged timber walkway, and down onto the sand, where it's a total party.



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05 Buffalo, New York's Maggie Cryan was having more fun than anyone else, racing in her '29 Model A roadster pick-up. Powered by an original four-banger with a high-compression head, the open-cab truck was built by Maggie and her husband Steve with TROG in mind, but it's street-registered and driven regularly

06 Another car with vintage racing pedigree was Jerry Chin's flathead-powered Model T roadster, which was first built and drag-raced in Idaho in the 50s. Jerry drove all the way across the country from Seattle to race at TROG and asked the obvious question: "Why would you want to be anywhere else this weekend?"

07 The 1909 ALCO 'Bête Noir' ('The Black Beast') is a race car built by the American Locomotive Company to promote its short-lived automobile division. "The company made five racers, and nobody knows where the other four are," said owner Howard Kroplick. Still running the original T-head six-cylinder, which revs to 1400rpm and makes 100bhp in fettle form, the ancient relic warmed every cockle as it chugged up the beach



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You don't have to be dressed in period-correct costume to feel welcome. This shindig is for everyone, including families and pet dogs. The eighth-mile race track is set up along the shoreline with the Atlantic Ocean as the backdrop, and there are several vantage points for punters to take in the racing.

The huge pit area, which doubles as the staging lanes, buzzes with pre-war machinery and people dressed in embroidered overalls and aviator goggles. But this is not just old folks reliving their glory days. There are plenty of younger participants who have tapped into the spirit of where all this is coming from.

One racer from the old school was 76-year-old Charlee 'Speed' Swanson from Montclair, New Jersey.

"The Race Of Gentlemen is giving an old guy like me a chance to do what I love, and Wildwood is the perfect place for it," said Speed, who was racing his primer-grey roadster. "The town is so welcoming to the racers and the event. I used to bring my kids down here on vacation; now I'm the one having all the fun!"

Heads-up racing on the beach is pretty straightforward. Two vehicles line up on the start line and when the girl with the chequered flag starts jumping up and down and waving it like it's on fire, they hit the gas. The cars throw sand at one another down the eighth-mile stretch and whoever crosses the finish line first wins.

According to main organiser, Mel Stultz of The Oilers Car Club, the beach at the 2021 event was primed for good, safe racing. "This is the best event so far," he declared. "The beach is the best that Mother Nature has ever given us – the sand is hard and the tide is where we like it. Every year it changes, so in a sense you can never have this track figured out."

Racing starts when the tide goes out around 8am, and doesn't stop until the tide comes in around mid-afternoon. The startline barriers are shifted around at various times during the day to make best use of the conditions.

"Every race is different, because the tide changes where the track is," explained racer Robert Nieves, who had his ratted-up roadster



01 "I was born in 1945 and have been infected by hot rods since childhood, and this event is bringing it back to the early days of racing, before sponsorship and big dollars put the average guy out of it," said Charlee 'Speed' Swanson, who was reliving the glory days in his '29 Model A roadster, powered by a stock banger with Weiland head and two Stromberg 81s

02 There were a few old oval-track open-wheelers being repurposed for beach racing, including the Alperti 'White Phantom' sprintcar owned and piloted by Artie Conk from Summit, New Jersey. "This car was built in 1933 in Madison, New Jersey," Artie said. "Sam Alperti built three of these 'big' cars, and this is the second one." It runs the Model A four-pot it came with, rebuilt and spiced up

03 Skip Durgin built his rail from the remnants of a 1929 Chevy sedan. "I pulled this out of a barn five years ago," he explained. "One of the barn beams had fallen and crushed the body during Hurricane Sandy in 2012, so a rail dragster was perfect." It runs the original stock stovebolt six but with a '32 Chevy intake manifold to allow for use of a downdraught carb

04 Connecticut's Chris Beckwith lapped the beach in his boat-tail speedster, which has the bones and heart of a 1928 Chevy. The back half of the body is made out of filing cabinets and stuff, with a modified '39 Lincoln bonnet for a tail. The original 171ci four-cylinder has been bastardised for performance: "It's got Model A connecting rods and GMC pistons, which give it a higher compression rate," Chris said



## HISTORY IN MOTION

THERE'S a hell of a story behind the hellishly cool '33 three-window 'Omaha Coupe', which was racing for the first time in 58 years at TROG. Its saviour and custodian, Tom Secora of South Omaha Speed & Fabrication, fell in love with it as a kid and spent 30 years tracking it down.

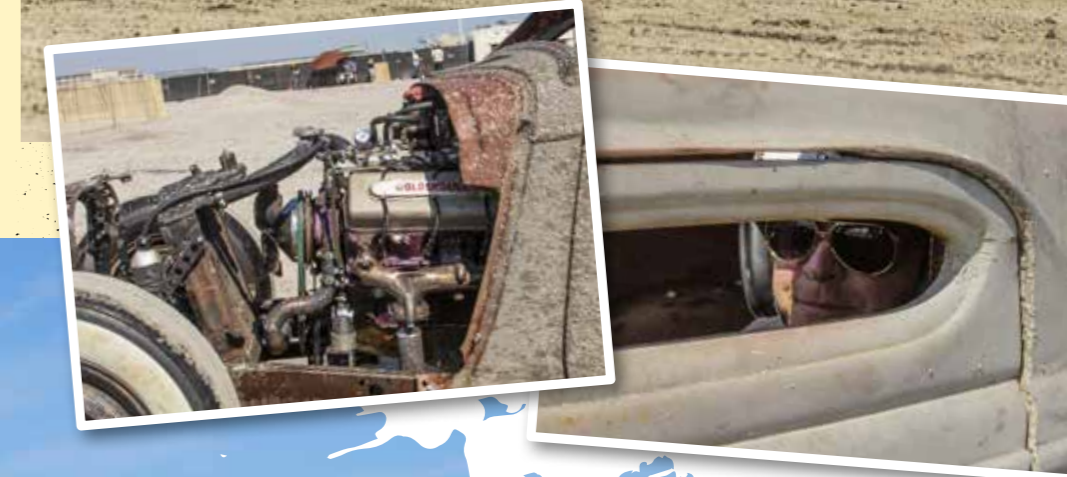
"It was chopped in Omaha in 1953 by a guy named Bob Hartwell, who raced it with an Oldsmobile engine," Tom explained. "This ain't no joke; we're talking about a 68-year-old hot rod here! This is history."

Hartwell raced the coupe at drag strips all over the Midwest and at Bonneville for a few years in the 1950s before it passed through several owners, including Nebraskan legend Henry 'Howdy' Williams, who ran it at Bonneville in '57, and Bill Hannah, who painted it orange and drag-raced it as the 'Orange Crate'.

"I first saw it in an alley in 1990 when I was riding my bicycle, and my life was instantly changed," Tom said. "By then it was owned by a guy who had it for 50 years and planned to do something with it but never got it going."

After decades of researching the coupe, Tom was able to acquire it through an associate last year.

"I was knocking on doors, calling people out of the phone book – this story is crazy," he said. "It was a journey, but now we've brought it back, with a 1949 303 Oldsmobile in it and an old Ford tranny and banjo, just like Hartwell created it."



THE BEACH IS THE BEST THAT MOTHER NATURE HAS EVER GIVEN US – THE SAND IS HARD AND THE TIDE IS WHERE WE LIKE IT





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01 This beach-going T-bucket made its debut in the hands of New Jersey's Hondo Elicerio, who built it just for TROG. "I only drove it for the first time yesterday," he said. "It's a custom-fabricated chassis that I made with a dropped '38 Ford front end. The motor is a 239 Y-block that's been bored and ported and everything else, big cam, with a '39 Ford trans and '36 banjo rear"



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02 Natasha Turner from Newburgh, New York was the only female in the flathead V8 class, racing her '31 Model A five-window. The flattie was donated by her partner, Pat Maroney, who was racing at TROG on his vintage Harley-Davidson. "Pat had bought that motor for a 1940 hot rod he was building," Natasha said. "So I found the body, stole his motor, put it together and it's been running great!"



03 Chicago's Chris Basile thrashed to get his '29 Model A roadster done for TROG '21. "I've thrown a bunch of crazy parts at it," he said. "It's got a 59A flathead with four Stromberg 81s, but I only drove it for the first time after I got here." Chris was running it with a vintage aircraft seat but plans to put a bench seat in so his wife can cruise alongside him



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TO BE ABLE TO PUSH THE LIMITS WITH SOMETHING THAT WAS ONLY SUPPOSED TO GO 50 MILES AN HOUR IS SO MUCH FUN



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04 Looking badarse on the beach, Adam Waring's '34 five-window chop-top sports an 8BA flathead backed by a '39 three-speed and '40 banjo rear. Adam, a drag racer from Storrs, Connecticut, usually runs the coupe on the eighth-mile at Winterport Dragway in Maine, but how quick does she go on sand? "Not very," Adam replied

05 This was the third time Robert Nieves had hauled his '31 Model A jalopy over from Milwaukee for TROG. Apart from the race numbers, the body remains as-bought from a local swap meet and rides on an original chassis, powered by a fettled four-pot. "All the engine parts came from near my house at Specialty Motor Cams, started by Bill Stipe, the godfather of modern Model A performance parts," Robert said

06 Making its racing debut was Kevin Amar's fiercely chopped and nicely packaged '34 five-window. Kevin, from Meridian, Idaho, sourced the steel body a year ago and built and painted the rod in his garage. "It runs a pretty stock flathead with Almquist heads," he said. "The motor hadn't run since the 60s, but I pulled it out from under the bench and it basically fired back up"

