

Montana 500 2002

by Mark Hutchinson

This year's Montana 500 was a thrilling event. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. With that said, I'd like to review a little bit of Endurance Run 2002. I never got above the top 5 position (that was my starting number), so the view will be a view from the back. We all have our own stories, but I hope you can relate to some of these events.

I'll start by saying thank you to all the people who worked hard to make this event happen in the first place. The flaggers, trouble truck drivers, and anyone who made it easy for us to go and play with our grown-up toys for a week! Next, congratulations to Tom Carnegie for winning the event in the men's division and to Nan Robinson for taking the ladies' trophy. Last, I would like to congratulate the rest of us: We all finished! After all that is the point right? With that stated, I'll start by talking a little about just getting there, cause that seems to be half the fun.

We all seem to have our own way of preparing for the Montana 500. Our methods range from the one extreme of tearing down the car the day after the run (mostly the winners) and tweaking it to within 500 miles of it's death; to checking the water, oil, and battery in hopes she'll start and run better than last time. In any case we all have our own checklist that we go through in hopes of finishing. Personally, I rode around trying to break-in a newly rebuilt engine 'til I was blue in the face, and a few other body parts as well, only to find that it sure ran a lot better in Washington than it did in Montana. Next year my checklist will include a carburetor rebuild. I should have seen it coming, since Tom and I drove over to Helena and the closer we got, the poorer it ran. While we had a short drive, some of us came from as far away as Georgia and Ohio. My hat is off to everyone who came to this event. Well, now that you mention it my hat is off completely, having been blown away by one of the few J gusts of wind we encountered during the second day of driving. But wait, I'm getting ahead of myself. As we all know, we start with the Safety Inspection.

Most arrived either Saturday or Sunday in time to get our cars inspected. Tony Cerovski and Rick Carnegie did the lion's share of the work to ensure we were all properly wired and sealed, Ruckstells disconnected, and that we had lights, brakes, and a horn, that worked. O.K., I'll try to have the horn working by next year as well. Rick Carnegie thought it was a little cheesy that I had to hold onto the horn and hit the button at the same time to ground it out since it was a little loose, but given that it made a noise they let it go. In any case how many of you honk at another driver to get out of the way anyways? I'll tell you after two years of doing this, and having been passed by every car in both races (minus one or two), no one has ever honked at me yet! In any case, it's on the checklist: Fix the horn! To keep this from being a stinky old race Gary Gordon passed out ODO-BAN to anyone who would take it. Guess he likes the stuff? I believe the only car not inspected on Sunday was Sam Nichols'; seems he would be a little late getting in.

Late in the afternoon some ominous clouds started to build to the west of the city. Tony Cervoski, a local to Helena, said this was a pretty normal event and that we could expect a storm around 5:00 P.M. He also stated the clouds would be pushed down the valley, circle around, and be back about 10:00 P.M. for another go of it. What he failed to say was this storm system would not escape the valley for the next three or four days and that this cycle would continue, pretty much up until the end of the event. Guess he was kinda keeping that little secret to himself, not wanting to spoil our fun of discovering Montana for ourselves. Thanks, Tony! Well, the last car passed inspection with the help of a droplight. Finally we were ready for the first day's run through White Sulphur Springs and back to East Helena, approximately 195 miles.

Probably the most memorable thing that happened to all of us the first day was when we were handed the directions for the upcoming three days of driving. It's amazing to me how many people over the course of a few short days would modify these directions to their own liking, not worrying about the added time they would incur. I know I appreciate their kindness. However, add to the checklist to ask if we are supposed to turn north, south, left or right at the intersections posted on the directions, then write it on the paper, because I'm not remembering things so good anymore, and it's a tough call at speed. At one of these turns, Rick Carnegie decided to get the help of the state patrol, something about he couldn't remember if he had any felonies or not. Apparently, according to the officer, he didn't. Now we all know. Geez, we think of the strangest things while driving our T's don't we? Well I guess it was just an excuse he was using to give us all a thirteen-minute head start. Thanks, Rick!

Anna Marx, also feeling a little sorry for us, forgot to check her gas tank before leaving town and while the new car was running strong, it only did this while it had gas. I know it sounds silly now but how many of us can honestly say we have never run out of gas before? Just the timing was pretty poor that's all! Anna, maybe you need to work on your timing? Come to mention it, so do I. Another thing going on the checklist for next year: Check the timing! It certainly wasn't long after getting gas that Anna passed me like I was standing still. O.K., fine, I must have been changing a coil or something. We all pretty much ended the day about the same time, except for Ron Miller who decided to take a little side trip. He joined us a couple hours later for dinner and was extremely good-natured about the whole thing. His son B.J. Miller was also going his own way for a while, but got turned around in plenty of time to finish the event in third place, just three seconds ahead of Gary Ebbert. After a nice meal and some stories, we mostly did last minute preparations for day two to include tuning up coils on a tester that Tom Carnegie donated to the club and Rob Flesner set up on one of the trouble trailers. Everything in order we retired for the evening ready for the second day. Our next day's route was out to Choteau and back, around 191 miles.

The first leg of the day would be one of the fastest runs of the trip. I don't believe everyone passed me on this leg, but quite a few did. Rob Flesner's car developed a little knock and wound up on the trailer, and come to think about it Dave Huson was also on the trailer on day one. Both of these cars would be put back together. Dave I believe needed a rod and Rob needed a main tightened. In any case, lots of people chipped in and got both cars going again. The second day was noteworthy for weather: lots of wind, rain, and some sunshine every once in a while. I swear it seemed to me no matter which way we were heading, we were going into the wind, but as I said earlier that storm was circling around the valley and so were we. Hey, I wish someone would put it on their checklist for next year to let's try to circle in the same direction as the storms, want to? I'm not sure if anyone got lost on the second day or not, but I know we were all accounted for before dark. Since we were now starting to get into a routine, we went over to check the coils again and put the battery on charge overnight. Hmm, another checklist item: Make sure the lights are not on while trying to charge the battery. We then settled down in anticipation of tomorrow's events. I'm not exactly sure where we went, but it was about 114 miles.

Day three started the same as the last two: Wipe the rain off the car, turn the lights off (damn!), and drive to the starting point. Somehow, and I'm still not certain what happened, Scott Stubbert lost his son and his "T" somewhere between the hotel and the starting point. Fortunately for me, the car and his son showed up just in time to take off in his position. Fortunate because my car wouldn't stay running and since I was supposed to follow him, that gave me another minute to get running again in hopes of making my time. Well this tactic seemed to work and we were off. Seems Ted Ballard would miss the first turn-off and add some time to his run as well. Most of the day I spent trying desperately to stay ahead of Mike Robison, who was plagued with constant timer problems, and trying to catch Art Hedman, just to say I could. But, as it turned out, I couldn't! Quite a few of us had problems on this day of where to go and once we all got rounded up we decided to cut out one of the trickier legs. It was pretty much easy sailing back to Helena from there. What beautiful scenery! I know that I had a lot longer to enjoy the Montana countryside than a lot of you did. I'll bet Doug Langel is laughing at me right now because as far as he is concerned he's seen more of Montana than probably any of us. Lucky man. To be honest I think this has got to be some of the prettiest country I have ever seen. At the end, all that was left was to tear down the winners.

Tony and his wife invited us to their home for a fried chicken feed and a Model T tear-down. Thank you for your hospitality! The first three cars were inspected by some pretty knowledgeable/capable people and judged to be legal, and the run results would stand as they finished. Obviously there will be items to talk about at the annual meeting, as there should be. If not, why have meetings? That's another story. This one is just about concluded. Next day, after the tear down, some people left for home, some went on a tour. We followed Tom and Susie Carnegie back to Spokane. We rode in the Dodge pickup, trailering the T; they drove the winning car home another 310 miles without missing a beat. I guess after three years of trying to get one to stay together long enough to finish the Montana 500, you made a winner this time!

Tom, the only thing I can say is everyone will be gunning for you next year. As you can see, some of us will have pretty comprehensive checklists; perhaps someone will even have one better than mine? Are you scared yet? If I were you, I'd start preparing early cause something tells me your car won't be fast enough next year!

Good luck to all next year. I had a fantastic time.