

he hears the characteristic clonk of the pistons hitting the underside of the head as the shaft bows. Then he knows he's in top revs for that gear, and must change up one!)

In the cause of quiet motoring, the Austin company fitted a new and improved rear main, so stiff that it could scarcely be turned by hand. This kept the grumble at bay for 100 miles, but when it arrived, it stayed. In a further desperate effort, the manufacturers put a center bearing on the crankshaft. This nifty device supplied not only growl in various keys, but the exciting stereophonic sound of a fracturing shaft and a jolly tinkle as various innards burst outwards. The Seventy-Fifty Motor Club casts their car badges from alloy crankcases that have taken this route to the Happy Hunting Ground. The Club has 2000 members, most of them have car badges, and there's no shortage of metal in sight. As a memorial to a lesser evil, the Good-acre Trophy, Club award for the highest score of the season in the 750 cc formula, is a polished and chromed two-bearing crankshaft — possibly on the theory that anyone who has taken an Austin Seven through a season of racing could probably use one.

When the slide-rule boys decided that the Baby Austin was a miracle of engineering, they had various straightforward features in mind, such as its unconventional chassis, its muscular little engine, and its utter reliability. However, one of the most miraculous bits of mechanical foolishness on the car involves its thoroughly mediocre steering layout. The parts are absolutely standard: steering wheel on top, steering column, and, on the bottom, a worm and gear in the steering box. Now, by some process Sir Isaac Newton must have overlooked when he was figuring out his law of gravity, oil manages to leave the steering box, drip *up* the steering column, and land on the driver's trousers. Nobody has figured out anything to do about this either, except to wear oil-colored pants.

After dripping up, it's a cinch for the highly talented oil used in Austin Sevens to sneak out of the gearbox, crawl forward along a revolving drive-shaft — which ought to throw it sideways, if centrifugal force hasn't been repealed — and soak the clutch lining. Austin Seven drivers are continually pulling up at the nearest drug store for Fuller's Earth, an absorbent powder which is dumped into the clutch housing via the inspection plate, to sop up the oil and cure clutch slip.

This clutch is the secret of the Seven's "pep without power." Since it has a travel of only an eighth of an inch, smooth starting is next to impossible. Letting in the clutch generally results in a convulsion that racks the little car

## ACTION IN ARIZONA

**H**OT on the heels of Daytona's Speed Week the public, still reeling from the knowledge that "production" Chevy Bel Airs can do 121 mph, Dodge D-500's 130, and Corvettes 145, was confronted with the results of another festival of speed, this one devoted to products of the Ford Motor Company.

The occasion was the public dedication of Ford's magnificent new 3840-acre proving ground in the desert near Kingman, Arizona. The specific site was one of the proving grounds many facilities — a five-mile asphaltic concrete track with 2500-ft. radius curves banked as steeply as 60 degrees. The timing and certifying body was NASCAR and the first performer was a '56 Ford Sunliner convertible powered by optionally-available Thunderbird Special engine with 312 cubic inches displacement and an output of 225 bhp. This car was clocked at 110.337 mph for the standing-start ten miles and at 118.197 for the flying-start five miles. In all, it surpassed 18 national records, all by broad margins.

Next, 20 existing stock car records were blown to bits by Mercuries driven by Walt Faulkner, Johnny Mantz and Von Thompson. Among the new "records" set by Mercury were 115.207 for the standing five miles, 130.700 for the flying five, and 117.214 for a solid hour.

These Mercs, too, are cars that the public can buy. Their high speeds were achieved by means of 3.15 rear axle gears and a power kit consisting of a high-lift cam, dual four-throat carbs and manifold, and a set of ten-to-one cylinder heads. The kit has a suggested list price of \$465. The record cars were equipped with Firestone Super Sports racing tires; there is not a kit for souping up the brakes.

I made ten flat-out laps of the course with Mantz and was able to discuss the cars' performance with the three drivers. The acceleration of these machines surpasses anything in familiar U. S. touring car practice and their road stability at all speeds is exceptionally good. Faulkner's runs were

made while strong, gusty winds were blowing across the desert but he reported that they hadn't the least effect on the car's handling.

The one-hour record run was made by Mantz with an engine that had only 75 break-in miles on it at the start. Mantz reported that in over 100 flat-out miles the new engine never missed a beat and that the longer it ran the faster it ran. At the beginning of the run it would not wind beyond 4800 rpm but toward the end was turning 5200. It was Mantz' opinion that the car felt just as solid at 130 as at 30 mph and he proved this to my satisfaction while I was in the car.

On the same day the Mercury speeds were established, the Lincoln Division demonstrated that it is not resting on the laurels won in three Mexican Road Races. The instrument used in this demonstration was a '56 Lincoln Premiere sedan, drastically modified for purely experimental purposes, and *not* with power kit sales in mind. The car's engine was bored and stroked, had solid tappets, special manifolds, camshaft, crankshaft and distributor, and a centrifugal supercharger.

Chuck Stevenson, big silent two-time winner in Mexico drove this car through the NASCAR clocks at 146.599 mph; it was a fantastic sight to see so much machine hurtling at such speed. But that was only the *official* time. During preparatory runs, when only hand-held stopwatch times were being taken, Stevenson got in front of a tailwind and thundered (two straight exhaust pipes) through the traps at just over 157 mph. He told me after the runs that the car could be steered with the fingertips of one hand at its top speed.

Obviously, the most competitive sales era in the auto industry's history is forcing Detroit to return to auto racing, an activity which it carefully shunned for about 15 years. The public show of strength at Ford's Arizona proving ground made it clear to the world that another of the Big Three is firmly entered in the contention to come. — *griff borgeson*.