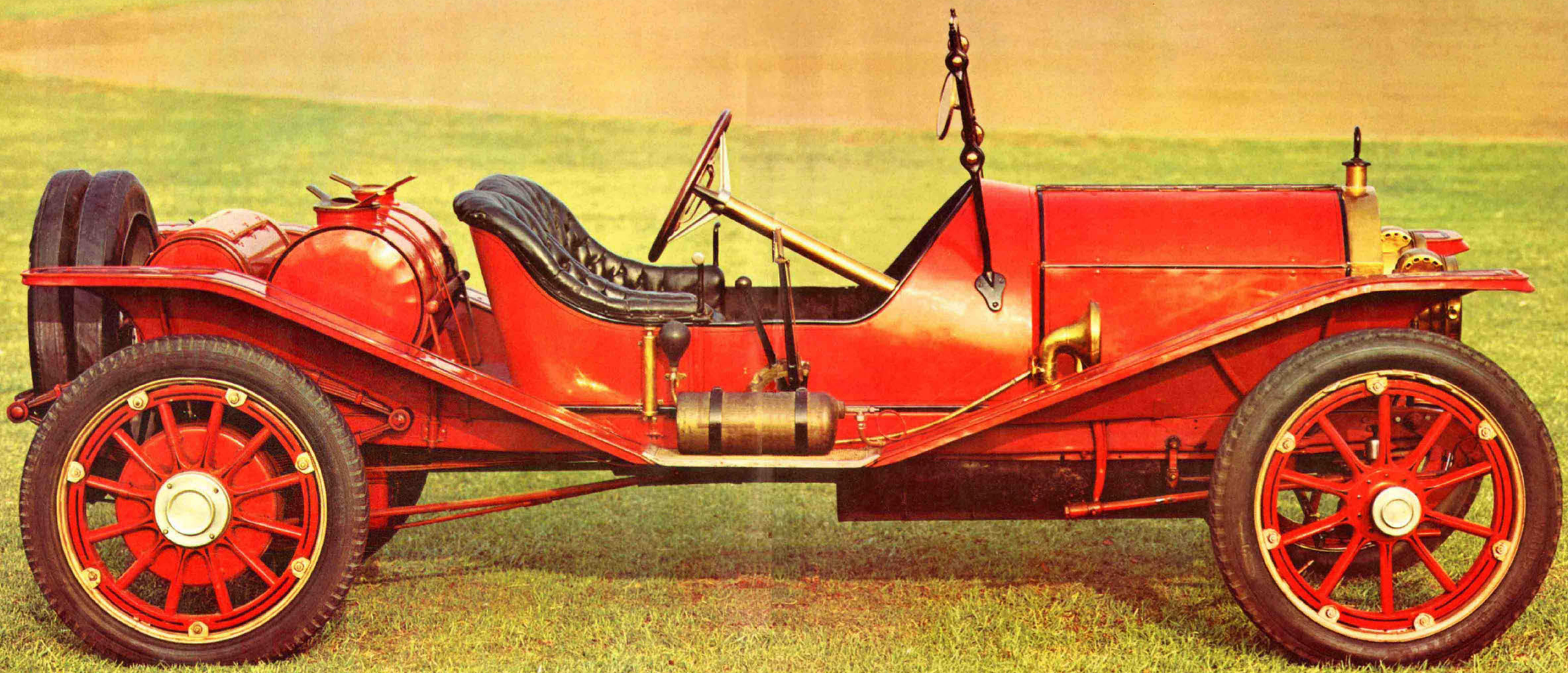
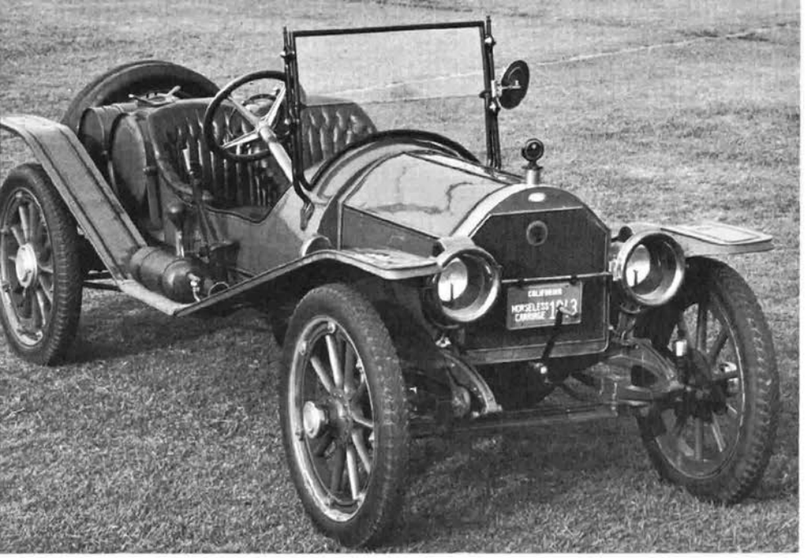
CAR LIFE CLASSIC

MARMON

Model 32 Speedster





CAR LIFE CLASSIC

MARMON

Model 32 Speedster

BY WARREN W. FITZGERALD

OWNER: HERBERT ROYSTON

PHOTOS BY RALPH POOLE

THE YEAR was 1851, and agricultural America was beginning to feel the stirrings of a revolution . . . the Industrial Revolution which would forever commit man to coexistence with the machine, peaceful or otherwise. Out in Indianapolis, Indiana, two gentlemen with a talent for making things work went into partnership as general machinists, founding the firm of Nordyke and Marmon. They prospered, for their talent was genuine and the Hoosier heartland had need for a firm such as this. After a short while they became specialists in the construction of grain milling machinery. D. W. Marmon had two sons, Walter and Howard, who were taken into the business as they grew to maturity. Walter became its president, and Howard its chief engineer.

As his later life repeatedly confirmed, Howard C. Marmon was a perfectionist. He finally ceased to build automobiles for a market which would not support such perfection, compromise being out of the question. Thus it is not surprising that in 1902, while casting about to find one of those newfangled automobiles suitable for his own use, he found he could not be satisfied with the available products. Who could have been better equipped than the chief engineer of a going machinery firm to do something about this? He gathered up a few assistants in the shop and built his own car. Soon it was running about the streets of Indianapolis, and as one might imagine, it was clearly superior to any others around. Howard Marmon's friends prevailed upon him to build them replicas, and this he did, completing three. It didn't take him, or brother Walter, long to realize the potential of the automobile business. They decided to go into it properly and wholeheartedly.

In 1904 they offered the Model A, an air-cooled, V-4 powered car, and got into large scale production the following year with the Model B. This car was marketed with refinements through the Model G of 1908. In 1907 they offered an air-cooled V-8, often thought to be the first American V-8. It wasn't, having been preceded by the Hewitt of 1906. As a companion to the Model G, the Model H was introduced, powered by a water-cooled V-4. In 1909 Marmon built the Model 50, similar to the H, but powered with a vertical four of 40-50 bhp and, in addition, the series to which our *Car Life* Classic belongs, the Model 32, powered with a smaller four. The Model 32 was in continuous production, with minor refinements, through 1913.

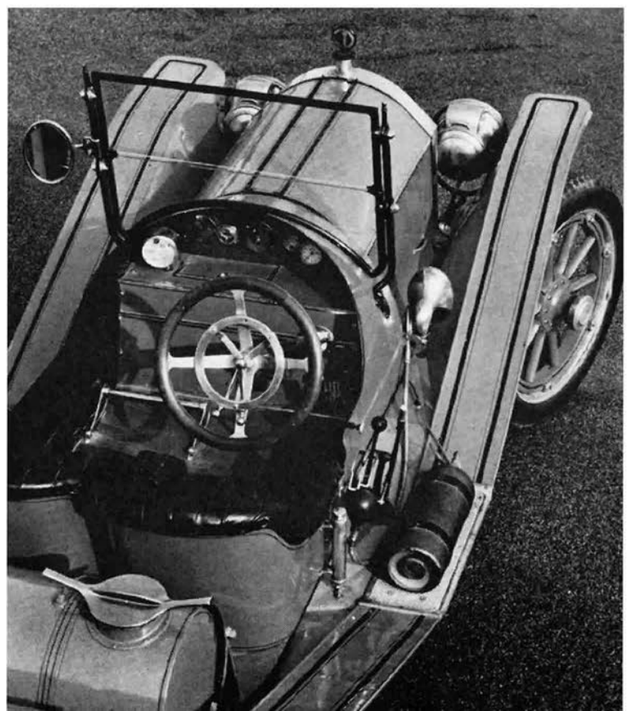
In 1909 racing came in a big way to Indiana, and specifically to Indianapolis. This was the year of the inauguration of the Indianapolis Speedway, and the hometown Marmons were out to do battle. Their chance came in the fourth race during the first day of the 3-day affair, when Ray Harroun won a 10-mile free-for-all handicap race at an average speed of 71 mph. In the final race of the second day, a 100-mile run for engines of 231 to 300-cu. in. displacement, Stillman's Marmon placed third, a feat he was able to repeat the following day at the cessation of the Wheeler-Schebler Trophy Race, scheduled for 300 miles. In this contest, Stillman's teammate, one Foxhall Keene, crashed, demolishing his Marmon and fracturing his mechanic's skull. The incident precipitated the calling of the race at 235 miles. The track was in miserable condition, having been inadequately constructed, and it is a tribute to Howard Marmon's excellent machinery that Stillman's race car was hardly affected by the tremendous pounding which literally shook lesser cars to pieces.

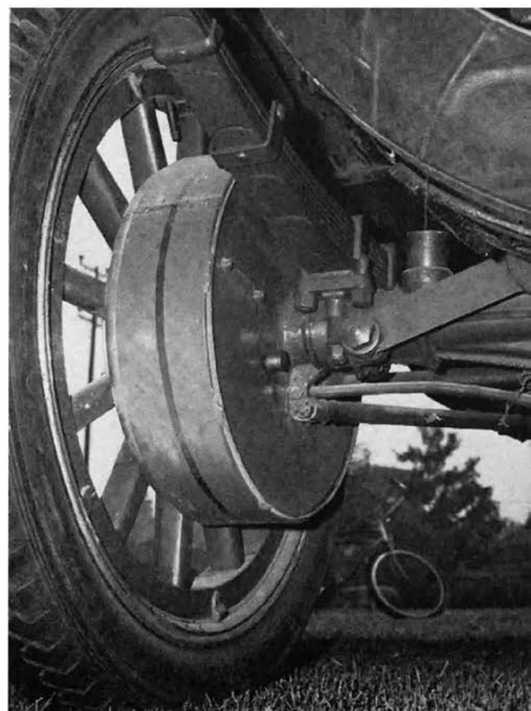
Thus the first year of the Model 32 Marmon's production found the company firmly committed to racing as the best way to place the car in the public view. And its literature left no doubt that it thought prospective purchasers would be impressed. Consider this paragraph from the 1911 Marmon 32 catalog:

"The manufacturer who enters his cars in competition with the best that this country or Europe can produce, confident that they will demonstrate their merit in the most hotly fought contests, must build to win in more sense than one. It would be doubtful recommendation to the average purchaser, as an inducement to acquiring a car of a certain make, that its manufacturer had succeeded in designing a special racing machine of unequaled speed. In basing your choice on the record of a machine that has been consistently victorious in competition, you are desirous of obtaining a car possessed of the same qualities of endurance and dependability, though you may have no wish to employ it in racing. For that reason every Marmon 'Thirty-Two' is built to win your approval of its performance in every day service quite as much as to capture trophies. Nothing but stock cars of regular manufacture are entered in stock chassis contests, but every Marmon is built with a degree of painstaking care that will enable it to stand the crucial test of racing." Turn of the century rhetoric may have been a bit different, but the sentiments seem to have stuck around.

The Marmon victory which will always remain in the minds of racing enthusiasts occurred that year, 1911, on May 30. On that Memorial Day, Ray Harroun drove the Marmon "Wasp" into the first winner's circle of the Indianapolis 500, or the International Sweepstakes Race, as it was then known. His total time was 6 hours, 42 min., and 8 sec.; his average was 74.61 mph; and he set records for the 300, 400 and 500-mile distances in the process. His car, driven without a mechanic on board, was the first Indy car to use a rear-view mirror. This Marmon Wasp, although it coincidentally carried number 32, was not of that model. It had a 6-cyl., T-head engine, delivering 48 bhp from a bore and stroke of 4.5 in. x 5 in., displacing 447 cu. in.

Subsequent factory publicity stated that the engine was not stopped, the ▶





MARMON
Model 32 Speedster

hood was not raised, nor was any water added to the radiator during the whole race. In a grind where most of the competition failed because of component fractures stemming from metallurgical deficiencies, the Marmon Wasp's victory was ample testimony to the thoroughness of Marmon engineering. Though the car weighed 2800 lb., the only tire needing replacement was on the right rear wheel, being changed three times. The other tires lasted the entire 500 miles. This appears to speak well for the chassis design and lends credence to the Marmon slogan, "The easiest riding car in the world."

The Marmon 32 was well accepted by the motoring public, and by the end of June, 1910, all of that year's models, which had been but slightly refined from those of 1909, were sold. The racing participation was providing invaluable publicity and inquiries were pouring into the Indianapolis firm at a satisfying rate. Again the 32 was to remain substantially the same. The wheelbase would be increased to 120 in., adding to passenger room and comfort, but otherwise refinements were to be minor.

The 4-cyl. T-head engine, with its cylinders cast in pairs, had a bore and stroke of 4.5 in. x 5 in., and displaced 318 cu. in. Marmon rated it at 32-40 bhp, depending upon speed, and stated that it would propel a passenger car at 75 mph. The engine was described in 1911 parlance as being of "barrel-type," which merely meant that the crankcase was roughly of cylindrical form, with the paired cylinders attached to it on top. A separate sump, cast in aluminum like the crankcase, was bolted on below, completing the assembly. With this arrangement, the forward main bearing was a solid bushing, while the center and rear mains were split. Thus the crankshaft was removable from the rear of the crankcase. The main bearing material was white brass, die-cast, and of generous dimensions.

The forged steel camshafts (there were two, this being a T head engine, or should we call it a dual underhead cam job?) actuated the valves through hardened steel roller tappets. The exhaust and intake valves were of equal dimensions and, in fact, were interchangeable. The intake manifold was cast into the cylinder head to insure vaporization of the fuel.

Careful attention to lubrication was a Marmon strong point and undoubtedly contributed to its reputation for reliability. Oil was circulated by means of an exterior-mounted, gear-driven oil pump. This device drew oil through a cylindrical screen in the sump, which served in a sense as an inbuilt oil filter. It could be removed for cleaning at oil-change time by removing a plate on the bottom of the sump. Not as efficient as our current cartridge types, to be sure, but it caught the big pieces.

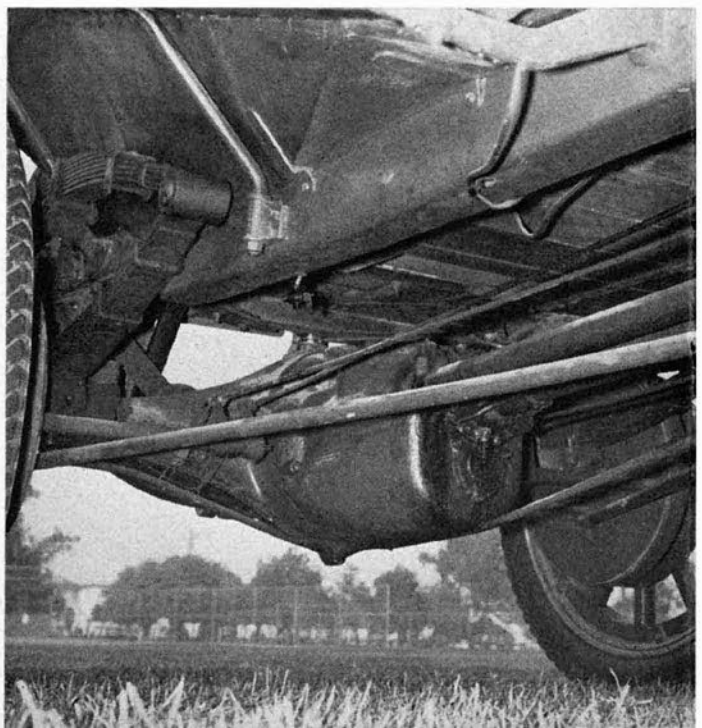
Oil was carried under pressure from the pump through a gallery directly to each of the three main bearings, from whence it entered the drilled crankshaft and then into the connecting rod bearings. From there it traversed the con rods and into the wrist pins. Oil passages extended the length of the crankshaft, insuring that each end of every main bearing got lubrication. Throw-off from the crankshaft took care of the cylinder walls and camshaft bearings.

Ignition was described as dual, but this referred to the use of both battery and magneto.

Lest anyone think the transaxle is a recent innovation, let him consider the Marmon transmission, which was joined to the rear axle at the differential for the "proper distribution of the weight, giving better balance and easy riding qualities, tire economy and extreme accessibility." The transmission and differential gears could be removed from the assembly after unbolting the cover at the rear and partly withdrawing the axle shafts. The transmission offered three speeds forward, one reverse, and was actuated by an external shift lever located on the right, outside of the body. All Marmons of this period were right-hand drive.

The 120-in. wheelbase chassis was suspended by full elliptic springs at the rear and semi-elliptics in front. Two-wheel brakes were provided, with 14 in. x 2 in. drums located on the rear wheels; 34 x 4 wheels were standard, but 32 x 4 size could be fitted, both available in Diamond or Goodrich quick-detach types. Continental Q.D. rims and two spares could be fitted for an extra $52.

Standard catalogued bodies included a touring car, suburban, or roadster at $2750, a limousine at $4000 and a landaulet for $4100, all FOB Indianapolis. Bodies were of cast aluminum, and sheet metal seat backs were used. Standard colors for all bodies were blue black with gray stripe, contrasting with gray running gear striped in black. Special colors could be had on order, for an extra $25, and entailed extra time. Uphol-



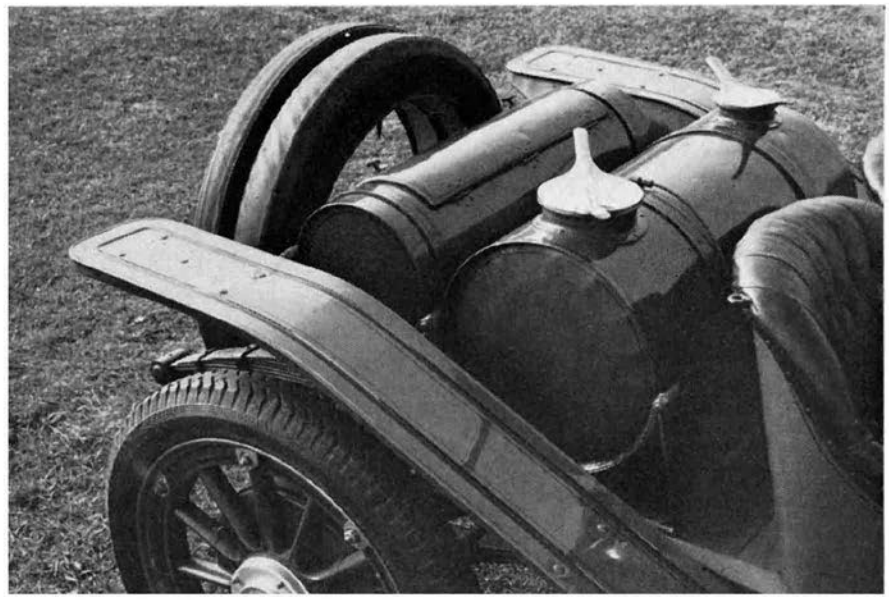
stery was genuine black leather over white curled hair.

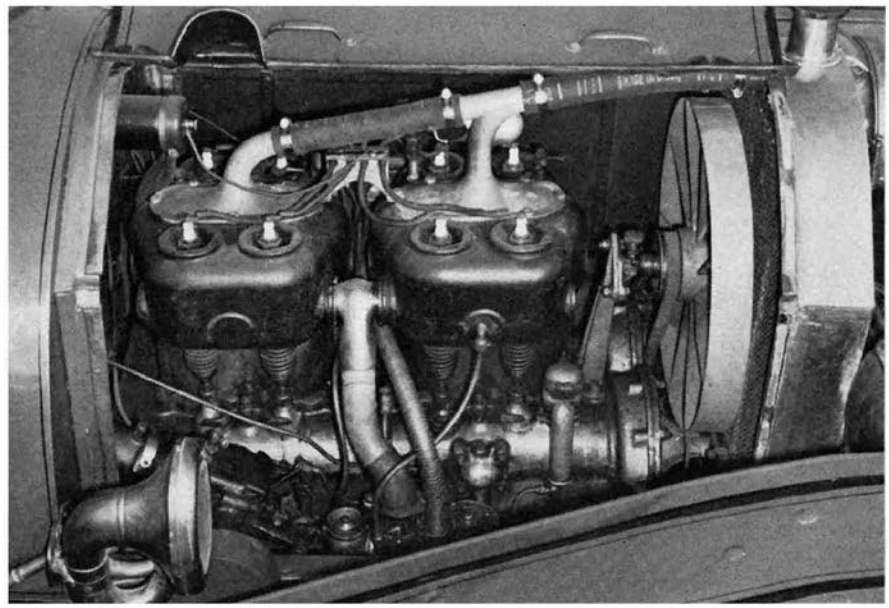
Our *Car Life* Classic is a speedster version of the Marmon 32, believed to be from the year 1911. Though the owner claimed the car to be a stock model, we combed the Model 32 catalogs covering 1909 through 1912 without turning up a speedster. The roadster bodies then offered all featured high doors and appeared to be of heavier construction. We strongly suspect that this was a competition version, a contention supported by its use of twin cylindrical gasoline tanks topped by quick-release wide-necked fillers, and that the fenders were a later concession to street use. We also fear that more of this Marmon's running mates would be hard to find these days, and that's a pity. ■

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS
1911 Marmon 32

Engine	Marmon, T-Head, 3 main bearings
Cylinders	4 in-line, cast in pairs
Bore & stroke, in.	4.5 x 5
Displacement, cu. in.	318
Cylinder head	Integral, non-detachable
Brake horsepower	32–40
Crankcase capacity, qt.	6
Fuel capacity, gal.	17 (standard bodies)
Transmission	3-speeds forward, 1 reverse, non-synchromesh, in unit with differential
Frame	Pressed steel
Front suspension	35 x 2 in. semi-elliptics
Rear suspension	40 x 2 in. full-elliptics
Wheelbase, in.	120
Tread, in.	56.5
Ground clearance, in.	10
Tires	34 x 4, 32 x 4 optional
Curb weight	Standard bodies about 2500 lb., Speedster n. a.

Full-color reproductions of the Marmon Model 32 Speedster, printed on heavy, 19 x 12 in. stock and suitable for framing, are available at $1 each from Car Life, *834 Production Place, Newport Beach, Calif.*





OILING SYSTEM route is traced by small arrows in this sectional drawing of Marmon engine. T-head arrangement put valves on either side of pistons.