

**T**HE YOUNG man standing in front of the large white sports car, hands jammed into the pockets of his raincoat, a jaunty cap on his head, had every right to be pleased. He and his co-driver were posing for the official pictures which followed scrutineering and weighing in for the Grand Prix d'Endurance at Le Mans in the summer of 1929. Their car had made it; they were ready to race.

It all began late in 1928, recalls the co-driver, Alfredo J. Miranda Jr., when the young man, Charles Moran Jr., approached him with the notion of preparing a car for Le Mans. Miranda was the New York City dealer and export distributor for du Pont cars and had supplied several town cars for the senior Charles Moran. Young Charles, then in his fourth year at Columbia University, had raced in Europe and suggested that du Pont build a sporting, individualistic model on the order of the old Mercer Runabout. This posed no problem for Miranda, for the president of the firm, E. Paul du Pont, was an avid sportsman. L. F. Hosley, chief engineer, and W. A. Smith, general sales manager, both had been with Mercer during that company's racing heyday. They needed little convincing.

The recollections of Charles Moran Jr. and G. Briggs Weaver, body designer for du Pont, differ slightly from Miranda's, in that they claim the Le Mans car to have been inspired by the 2-passenger speedster displayed at the New York Auto Show in the winter of 1928-29. However, du Pont released

## CAR LIFE CLASSIC 1930 du Pont SPEEDSTER

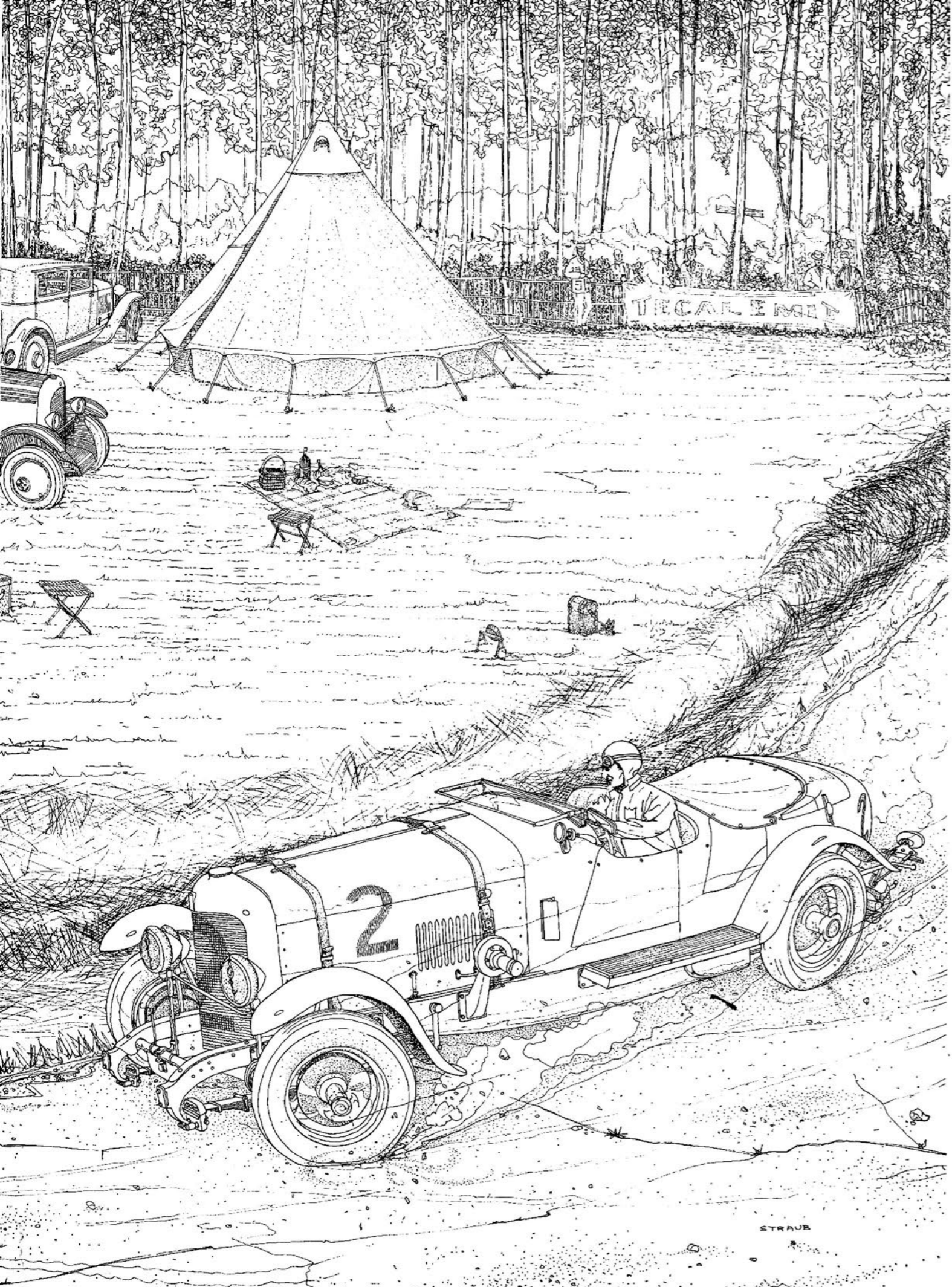
TEXT AND PHOTOS BY WARREN W. FITZGERALD

specifications for the 4-passenger Le Mans model dated Dec. 14, 1928, *prior* to the opening date of the show. The drawing which accompanied the data was that of Weaver's design for the Le Mans car. The show car was purchased by Mary Pickford for her husband, Douglas Fairbanks Sr., and on that basis, Weaver believes the 2-passenger version should have been called the "Pickford." It related to the Le Mans car in chassis only. Though du Pont's literature did not so describe them, all the speedsters have been commonly called "Le Mans." It can be said with certainty that the term was adopted in anticipation of running at Le Mans, rather than after the fact.

Work progressed during the winter and spring of 1929 on the Weaver-designed 4-passenger version and two cars were built for the task. In Moran's words, ". . . the 4-seater complied with the Le Mans specifications,

which were quite stringent at that time. They required cars over a certain displacement to have four seats and a top which covered the back seat and the front seat. This car was built to those specifications and had a disappearing top which went in behind the rear seats on top of the gas tank and was covered by sections of the body which were hinged." The second car, which was to have been driven by Maj. F. Sidney Cotton, an Australian sportsman, and his wife was either unfinished at sailing time or had been damaged with too little time left for repair and testing. So Moran and Miranda, accompanied by two du Pont factory mechanics, embarked late in May with only one car.

They were joined in France by Maj. Cotton, who became their pit crew and timer. Others on the team were Allen P. Cater, chief mechanic, J. Agate and S. Mabon, assistant me-



ARNAGE CORNER spectators saw du Pont driver Alfredo Miranda at his best in the 1929 24 Hours of Le Mans. Though he might have finished well up, ballast in his car shifted, crashed through flooring, bent the propeller shaft, retired the car and ended the American team's hopes for victory.

ILLUSTRATION BY  
ROBERT STRAUB

## 1930 du Pont SPEEDSTER

chanics, Louis Walner and Barry Lynham, a representative of Vacuum Oil. Initial practice and tuning were undertaken at the Linas-Montlhery Autodrome outside of Paris. Shortly afterward the group moved to Le Mans to set up the car for the course and acquaint the drivers with the Sarthe circuit. Both Moran and Miranda state they found the car too heavy. It was fairly fast for its day and Moran could lap at an average of about 72-73 mph. And then it was Saturday, June 15, race day.

The cars were lined up for the start on the basis of displacement. The big "Speed Six" Bentley of Woolf Barnato and H. R. S. "Tim" Birkin carried No. 1, the du Pont No. 2, and ranged behind them were three Stutzes, an Invicta, four 4.5-liter Bentleys, two Chryslers and a host of smaller cars. The opposition was formidable and it was obvious that a pitched battle between the Bentleys and the Stutzes could rage around the du Pont. Edouard Brisson had led the Bentleys in 1928 until the gearbox of his Stutz failed and had returned with a supercharged car. The English contingent of "Bentley Boys" was loaded for bear and the Chryslers, never far behind in the previous contest, posed a genuine threat.

The race began with the customary dash of drivers across the road. Tim Birkin boomed the big Bentley into the lead. Dr. J. D. Benjafield, benefiting from experience gained in five races at Le Mans, left his car in first gear with the ignition on. Punching the clutch and kicking the starter, he got off to a seconds-saving start and passed Moran's white du Pont before clearing the pit area. Even so, Benjafield's teammate, F. C. Clement, who likely knew the same trick, preceded him. Brisson's Stutz was not to be the immediate challenge it had seemed. The hard-driving Frenchman pulled into the pits after the first lap for a change of plugs. Moran was passed by the rapid 4.5 Bentleys and a Chrysler and settled



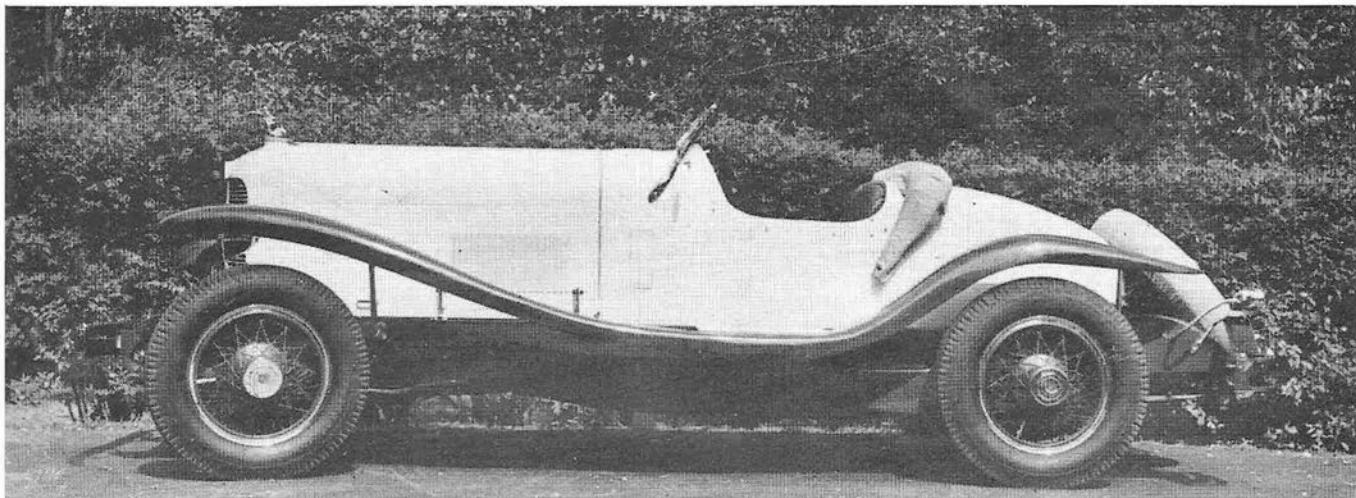
down to lap the course in the low 70s. But it was not to be his day. On the 20th lap his car was retired.

Miranda explains it thus, "For the race we had to carry a certain weight of ballast, which, in our inexperience, we carried in the form of sand bags fastened to the floor of the rear . . . the ballast shifted, crashed through the floorboards, jamming and bending the propeller shaft. It put our car out of competition as it was impossible to repair it by the man driving the car and with tools and spares carried in the car itself—as the rules called for." Thus ended the courageous and sportsmanlike attempt of two factory-assisted amateur American drivers to capture some glory for the U.S. at the 24 Hours of Le Mans. It was the first such effort, for Jimmy Murphy's legendary win at Le Mans in 1921 was the French Grand Prix for race cars, before the initiation of the 24-hour endurance contest for sports cars.

**W**ERE IT NOT for the untoward accident, the du Pont might have placed well at Le Mans, for with it came the heritage of a full decade of quality manufacturing. Eleuthere Paul du Pont, a member of the famous munitions and chemical family, started building the cars which bore his name in 1919. Prior to World War I he established the Delaware Marine Motors

Co. and after the Armistice, formed the du Pont Motor Manufacturing Corp. With him were Arthur M. Maris, formerly the guiding hand in the Biddle Motor Car Co. of Philadelphia, who became his vice president and general manager, and John A. Pierson, his chief engineer, whose experience had been with the Wright-Martin Aircraft Corp. E. Paul du Pont was allied with the side of the family which lost the struggle to control the huge powder and chemical firm and thus took no part in its affairs. It is interesting to note that it was stated in no uncertain terms "the new concern has no connection with the du Pont interest which controls General Motors."

The first du Pont motor cars were powered by 4-cyl. engines designed and built by the new company. Designated Model As, they were first exhibited at the Commodore Hotel Salon in November, 1919. In the following fall, the Model A du Pont was succeeded by the Model B, which featured improved cooling and minor refinements. The original du Pont chassis provided the basis for the Model C introduced in the summer of 1923 with a Model 90 Herschell-Spillman L-head Six replacing the 4-cyl. unit. Less than 50 Model C du Ponts were built when the design was superseded by the Model D, powered by a 6-cyl. Wisconsin engine. The bodies for this new car were



## 1930 du Pont SPEEDSTER

designed by G. Briggs Weaver, who was to continue this task with du Pont for the remainder of its existence. During the years 1925 and 1926, work progressed at a slow pace and only 27 Model D du Ponts were assembled.

An interesting but abortive attempt at supercharging was undertaken with the introduction of the Model E late in 1927. A low pressure, positive displacement blower fed air through a rotary distribution valve to the base of each cylinder, at the bottom of the intake stroke. This unique system was found to be ineffective as a means of increasing the power of the Model Y Wisconsin engine and was installed on one E chassis only. The Model F du Pont, introduced in the summer of 1928 was merely a 136-in. wheelbase version of the E, with a 4-speed transmission replacing the customary 3-speed. Sixty Model E and three Model F du Ponts were built by 1930.

Concurrent with these types was the Model G, first shown in the fall of 1928. The failure of the supercharger had prompted du Pont to look elsewhere for increased power and the answer lay in the adoption of the Continental 12K straight-Eight engine. This was of L-head layout, with a bore and stroke of 3.375 x 4.5 in. It displaced 322 cu. in. and was rated at 125 bhp at 3200 rpm. As installed in the du Pont, it looked like no other Continental straight-Eight. A finned, highly polished aluminum casting covered the top of the engine, completely concealing the ignition system. It gave the appearance of a more expensive overhead cam cylinder head.

The nominal wheelbase for the Model G chassis was 141 in., but as was often the case with very custom

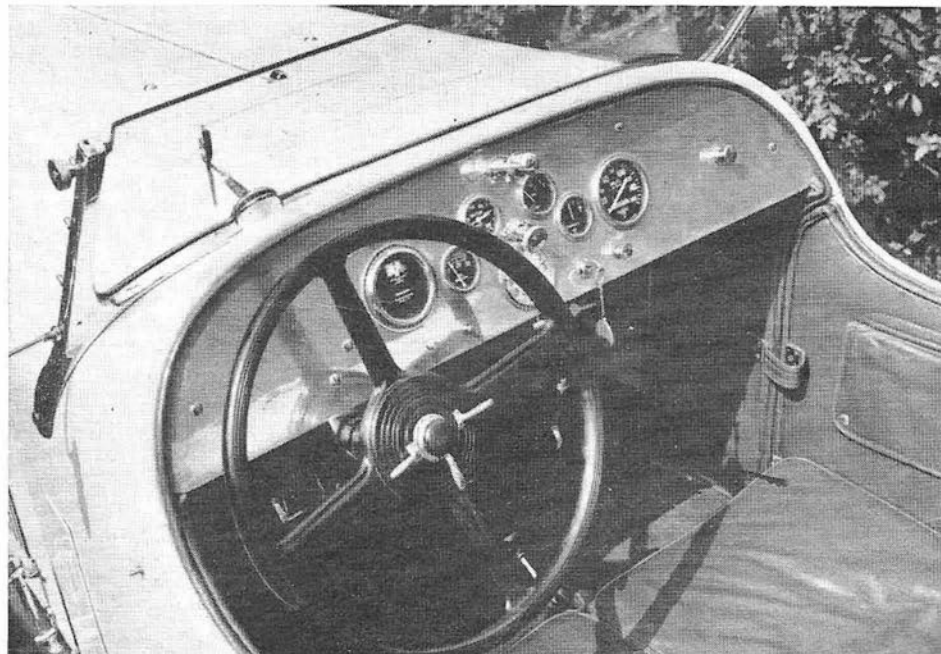
low production cars, other sizes could be obtained to fit body styles desired, ranging from 125 to 150 in. Tread was 58.5 in. Warner 3- or 4-speed transmissions were optional. Long clutches, Delco-Remy electrics, Lockheed hydraulic brakes, Columbia axles and Gemmer & Ross steering boxes were among the standard components used.

If the chassis were "assembled" from stock components, the bodies were not, each being custom built to Briggs Weaver's designs by Waterhouse (originally the Woonsocket Mfg. Co., of Webster, Mass.), the Merrimac Body Co., Merrimac, Mass., and the Derham Body Co. of Rosemont, Pa. A wide range of body styles was offered, including sedans, berlines and town cars in 5- or 7-passenger versions, a 5-passenger club sedan, coupes for 2 or 4 passengers, a 4-passenger convertible victoria, a 5-passenger convertible sedan, a 2-pas-

senger convertible coupe, 5- or 7-passenger phaetons, a 2-passenger roadster and speedsters for 2 or 4 passengers.

The speedsters were not so named merely for their body design, as they departed from the standard Model G specifications. They were built on the 125-in. wheelbase Model E frames and had considerable internal modifications to their engines. According to Allen P. Carter, chief mechanic for du Pont Motor and one of Moran's pit crew at Le Mans, the following changes were made: A new camshaft with faster rise and a reground heel was used; the dual-throat Schebler carburetor was replaced by a similar Stromberg; ports were enlarged and the intake manifold bored out; compression was raised; stiffer valve springs were employed and the Nelson Bohnalite pistons were replaced with cast aluminum versions by RayDay. This modest factory "hot rodding"

**THE SPEEDSTER's stark interior is direct from racing design. Immaculate restoration has earned owner R. L. Gehrt competition honors.**



produced an increase of horsepower from 125 to 140 and, with the lighter speedster bodies, a top speed of 100 mph was claimed.

With the flexibility available to a small firm, du Pont was able to produce speedsters in several versions. The 4-passenger Le Mans Replicas which followed the Moran and Cotton cars had flat backs. One of these, with a rear trunk and all mechanical parts faired over, was trimmed in red snake-skin. It was quite a hit at the 1930 Commodore Hotel Salon. Like the competition cars, the 4-place speedsters had short semi-cycle front fenders and cowl-mounted spares. A rear cowl and small windscreen offered more comfort for rear seat passengers.

**T**HE 2-PASSENGER speedsters were built in two styles, a blunt tail model with exposed spare tire and a pointed tail version with enclosed spare. The former featured a top which folded over the body exterior in the manner common to some roadsters of the day, while the latter had a completely disappearing top. On these cars, the rear top bow was contoured and finished to match the body surface directly behind the passenger compartment and dropped vertically into a slot. The handkerchief-like cover which snapped between it and the windshield frame was stored internally. These 2-place cars had long, one-piece aluminum fenders which swept the length of the body on either side.

Unlike the characteristic du Pont flat radiator shell, those found on all speedsters were of special cast aluminum design, softly contoured, and enclosing a finned stone-shield. This de-

sign appears to be an early version of the radiator grille, a feature which would become universal years later.

Just how many of the 273 Model G du Ponts produced between the summer of 1928 and the first few months of 1932 were speedsters is a matter of conjecture. S. Bryan Smith, a most knowledgeable historian of the marque who lent *CL* his files, believes nine speedsters exist. Three are 4-passenger Le Mans Replicas and the remaining six are divided equally between blunt and pointed tail versions. The fate of Moran's speedster is in doubt. Smith thinks the car which appeared in the foreground of a photograph accompanying a pre-war Fortune magazine article concerning the junking of automobiles was the actual Le Mans speedster. Perhaps it returned to France in the form of a 105 mm artillery shell in World War II.

*CAR LIFE's* Classic, a 2-passenger speedster with blunt tail and exposed spare was shipped to A. J. Miranda Jr. Inc. on March 9, 1930. Charles Moran Jr. personally delivered it to the Ormond Beach, Fla., home of the well-known mural painter, Fred Dana Marsh. As Marsh ordered the car, it was finished in black Duco with Espania red wire wheels and red leather trim. "Specials and Extras" as noted on the du Pont Motors Inc. "Car Record" were: Cut-out, electric windshield wiper, rumble seat in rear, special rear valance, side wings and rear spare wheel mounting. Under "Special Remarks" were found: Tachometer and ventilators top of cowl and sides. As with most du Pont speedsters, the streamlined Woodlites were specified for headlamps.

Marsh kept the du Pont until his

#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

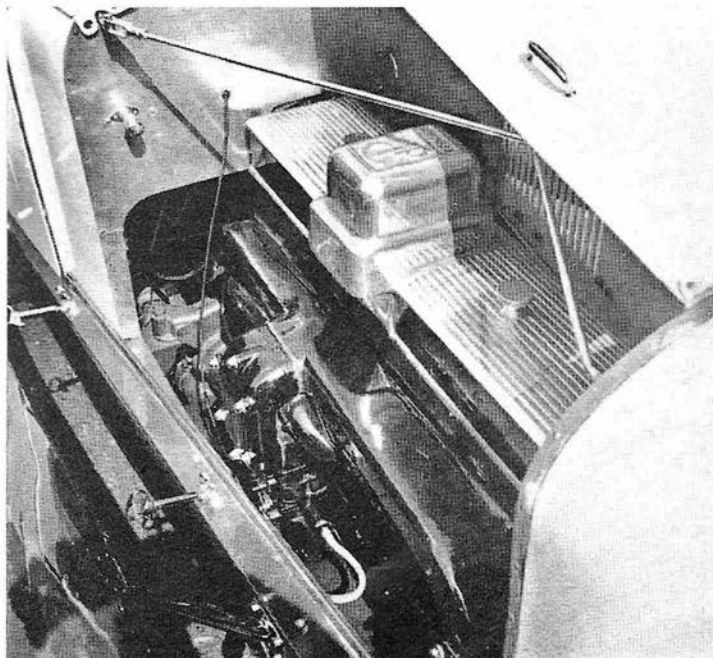
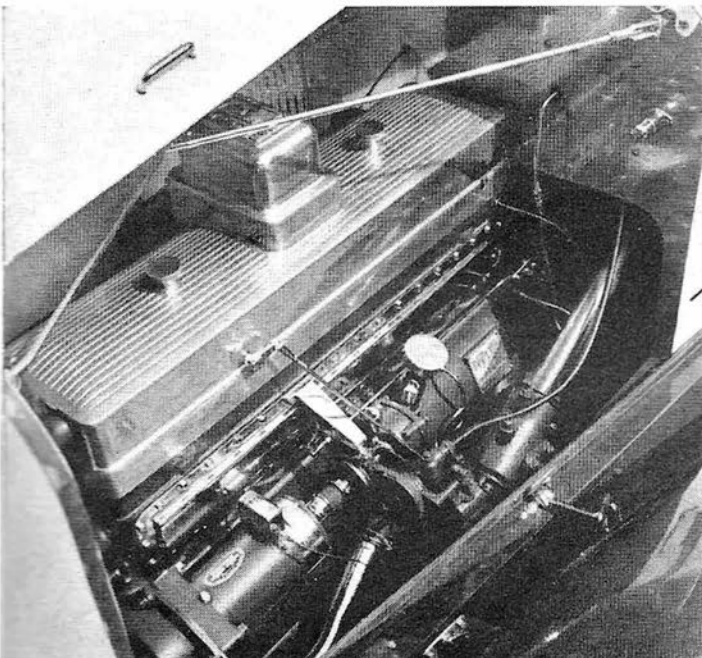
Engine . . . . .	Continental 12K, L-Head, du Pont-modified
Cylinders . . . . .	8, in-line
Bore & stroke . . . . .	3.375 x 4.5 in.
Displacement . . . . .	322 cu. in.
Taxable horsepower . . . . .	36.45 (SAE)
Brake horsepower . . . . .	140 @ 3600 rpm
Carburetor . . . . .	Stromberg
Fuel capacity, 20 gal. (2 reserve); Le Mans Replica, 45 gal.	
Coolant capacity . . . . .	6.5 gal.
Axle ratio . . . . .	3.69:1
Front suspension . . . . .	40 x 2 in. semi-elliptic springs
Rear suspension . . . . .	60 x 2 in. semi-elliptic springs
Wheelbase . . . . .	125 in.
Tread . . . . .	58.5 in.
Brakes, 4-wheel Lockheed hydraulics, 16-in. drums	
Tires . . . . .	30 x 5 U.S. Royal Cord (speedster)
Battery . . . . .	130 amp/hr.
Price . . . . .	\$4500 (2-pass. speedster)

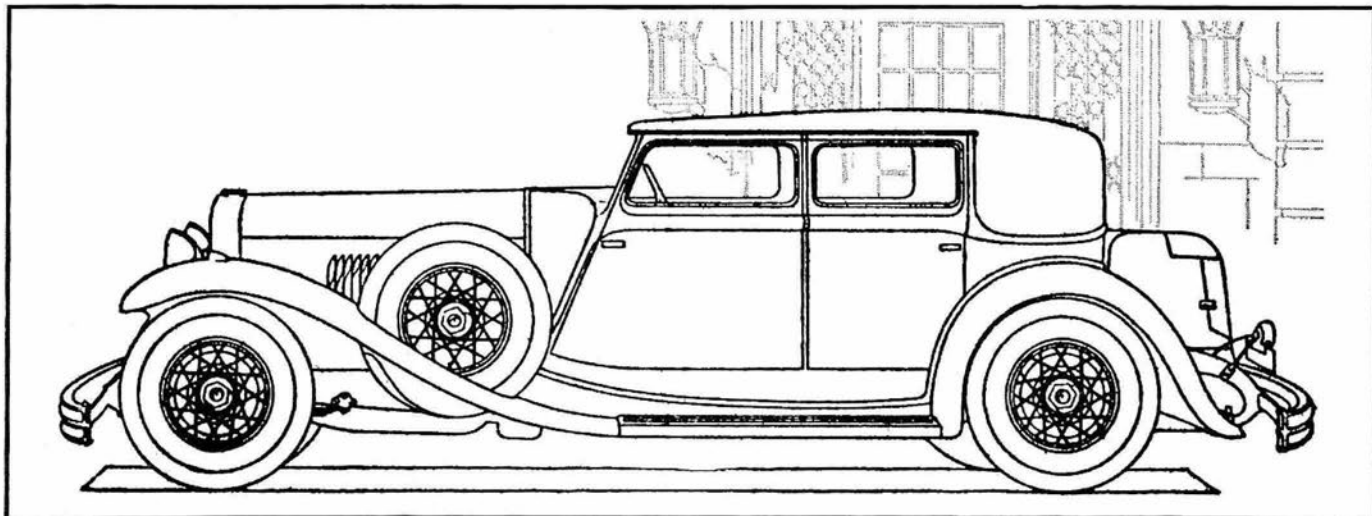
death, at which time the town of Ormond Beach found itself willed a speedster. The car was garaged in the fire station and driven occasionally by the fire chief. Robert Gegen, a Florida classic enthusiast, managed to purchase the du Pont and owned it for seven years before selling it to Joseph Murchio, a professional restorer. Murchio redid the car and placed it in his museum. There the speedster's latest owner, the late R. L. "Jack" Gehrt saw the car in 1959 and begged Murchio to sell it. Murchio refused, and upon his death, it passed to his brother Andrew Murchio, who finally sold it Gehrt two years later.

Gehrt completely restored the du Pont in the spring of 1964, bringing it to its present immaculate state. The engine, clutch, carburetor, distributor, generator and starter were disassembled and rebuilt. The brakes were overhauled and the car repainted. On its first competitive outing at the In-

CONTINENTAL 12K L-head engine developed 125 bhp at 3200 rpm with 322 cu. in. displacement.

POLISHED ALUMINUM cover conceals ignition system, gives the appearance of a more expensive overhead-cam layout.





**ELEGANCE** WAS the du Pont hallmark with such cars as this club sedan. Specifications included hand hammered aluminum body panels over a hardwood frame, hand-buffed leather, cast aluminum dash, and paint and upholstery to taste.

## 1930 du Pont SPEEDSTER

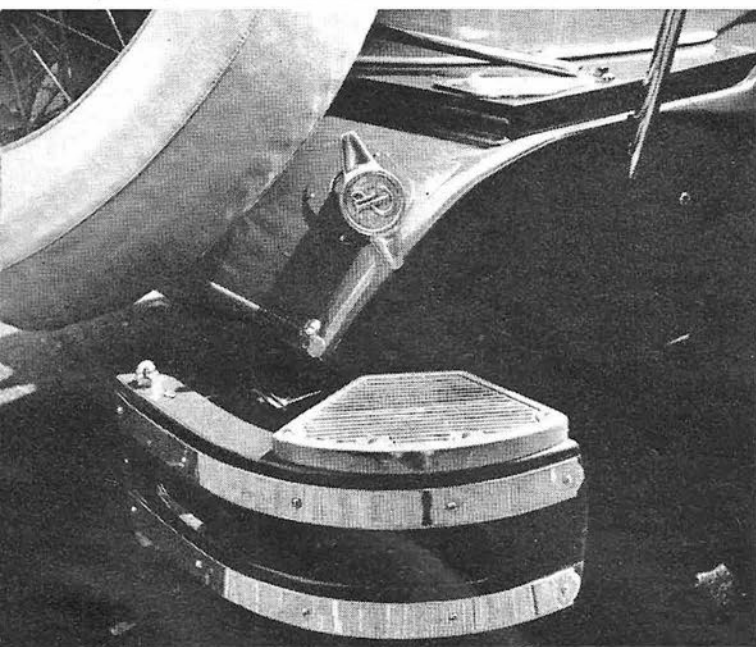
dianapolis section of the 1964 CCCA Grand Classic, the speedster was awarded 98.75 points, taking second in class and second overall. The decision was close, for the winning car scored 99.25 points. Jack Gehrt took the writer for a drive in the du Pont at the time the photographs were taken and the car was delightful to experience. The engine could be throttled down to a mere 100 rpm in fourth gear and, after motoring at a snail's pace, would pull away happily without a trace of bucking. As of this writing, Mrs. Gehrt plans to display the du Pont in the Children's Museum in Indianapolis.

In May of 1930, E. Paul du Pont announced that his firm had acquired the Indian Motorcycle Co., of Springfield Mass., and in June of that year the plant was remodeled to produce du Pont cars on the first two floors. Manufacture of automobiles continued on a very restricted basis, for the depression had severely limited the demand for custom luxury cars. In the fall of 1930, the Model H du Pont was conceived, using all of the chassis components from the Model G, but assembled on 146-in. wheelbase Stearns-Knight frames. Three prototype chassis were built for the Model H and upon them were constructed the only three of these cars to be completed. One was a berline, stated by Briggs Weaver to have been the best du Pont ever built, and another was a handsome sport phaeton. Both were displayed at the New York Auto Show in January,

1931. The third chassis was finished with a close-coupled Dietrich sedan body purchased from the remaining stock of unused Franklin bodies. Several incomplete Model G chassis were also equipped with bodies from that source and sold during 1931-32. At this time the du Pont motor cars, with many others, quietly passed from the scene.

E. Paul du Pont lived with the hope that a market for his uncompromising luxury cars would reappear, but this was not to be in his time. On Sept. 26, 1950, at the age of 68, he collapsed and died during a visit to his dentist. The memory of his contributions to the automotive world, overshadowed by the public image of the great E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., is kept alive by a small group of collectors who know that the name du Pont once meant quality motor cars. ■

**BLUNT STERN** carried spare, 20 gal. of fuel and two passengers in a snug rumble seat for a 1930 outing.



**DETAIL IN** restoration was carried through to the du Pont serial number and lubrication plaque underhood.

