"THEY MAY BE SLOW, BUT THEY SURE ARE UGLY"

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BY TERRY COOK □ Elsewhere in this issue we show you how to put a $1000 preparation on your Street Hemi to make it a bomber in the top Stock class. Now we're going to swing to the opposite extreme and focus on some cars which seldom win headlines, but whose owners smile at the pay window, nevertheless — those stockers in the extreme bottom classes. Come with us now as we turn back the clock and analyze the early Oldsmobiles. Here, rather than showing you how to best spend that grand on prepping the Hemi in your late Dodge or Plymouth, we're going to show you how to build a complete race car from scratch, a potential National Record Holder, for under $1000! Understandably you're not going to get mid-eleven-second elapsed times, but if you don't mind running in the fifteens . . . and sixteens . . . and winning, then the vintage Olds may be your schtick.

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Across the country there are a number of devotees who derive great pleasure from shutting down the late-model clientele with these archaic old battle wagons. Names like Sam Stockwell from Michigan; Ted Rohde out of Oregon; the Pennsylvania Worrell brothers, Jack and Ken; Sonny Coulter of California; Canadian Bill Wells of Vancouver; "the guys" from Racing Head Service (Smeltnicks-McWhirter-Woodard) down in Tennessee; Sam Shinaberry from Indiana; Gene Norris of Florida, and Keith Hodges, out of Alabama, are some of the super stars of the "slow car fleet." Of course, the name of the game has always been get to the finish line first. And under the handicap system, "cubic buck" big horsepower cars often find their match in the early Olds'. There's another bottom-of-the-alphabet guy out in California who currently holds three NHRA records with his Olds, is a veteran of dozens of major meets (including a phenomenal string of seven class wins at the Winternationals) and is responsible for some of the other good running T, U, & V class stock cars across the continent. His name is Keith Berg and he served as the information source for this piece, "The Old Olds Anthropologist" if you will. Through years of tinkering with archaic backdraft carburetors, spiriting out hard to find hardware, and experimenting with venerable connecting rods, Berg has earned his Ph.D. on the Old Olds. Oh yes, one more thing, Keith works on a budget such that he uses his head gaskets five times over, and pays but $7.50 for a complete set of rings. Get the picture? It's a low-buck operation, but the results can be great; and if this type of operation suits you, here are some tips we picked up from "Dr." Berg.

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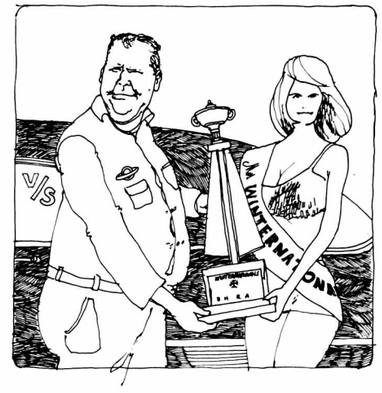

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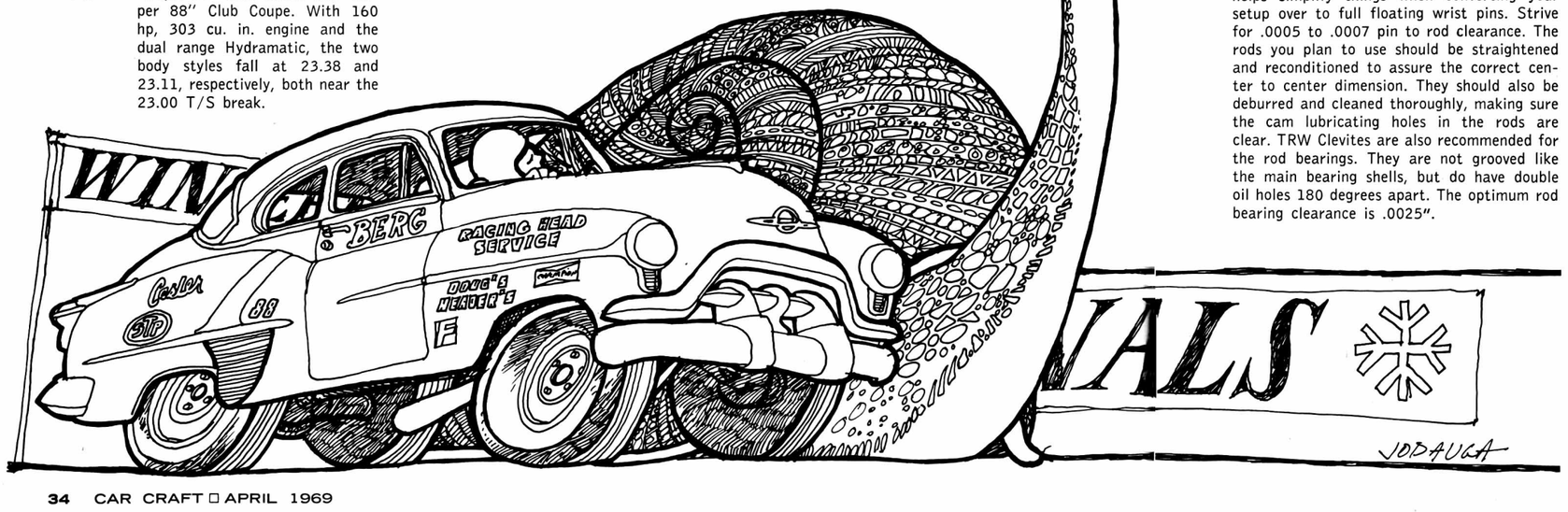

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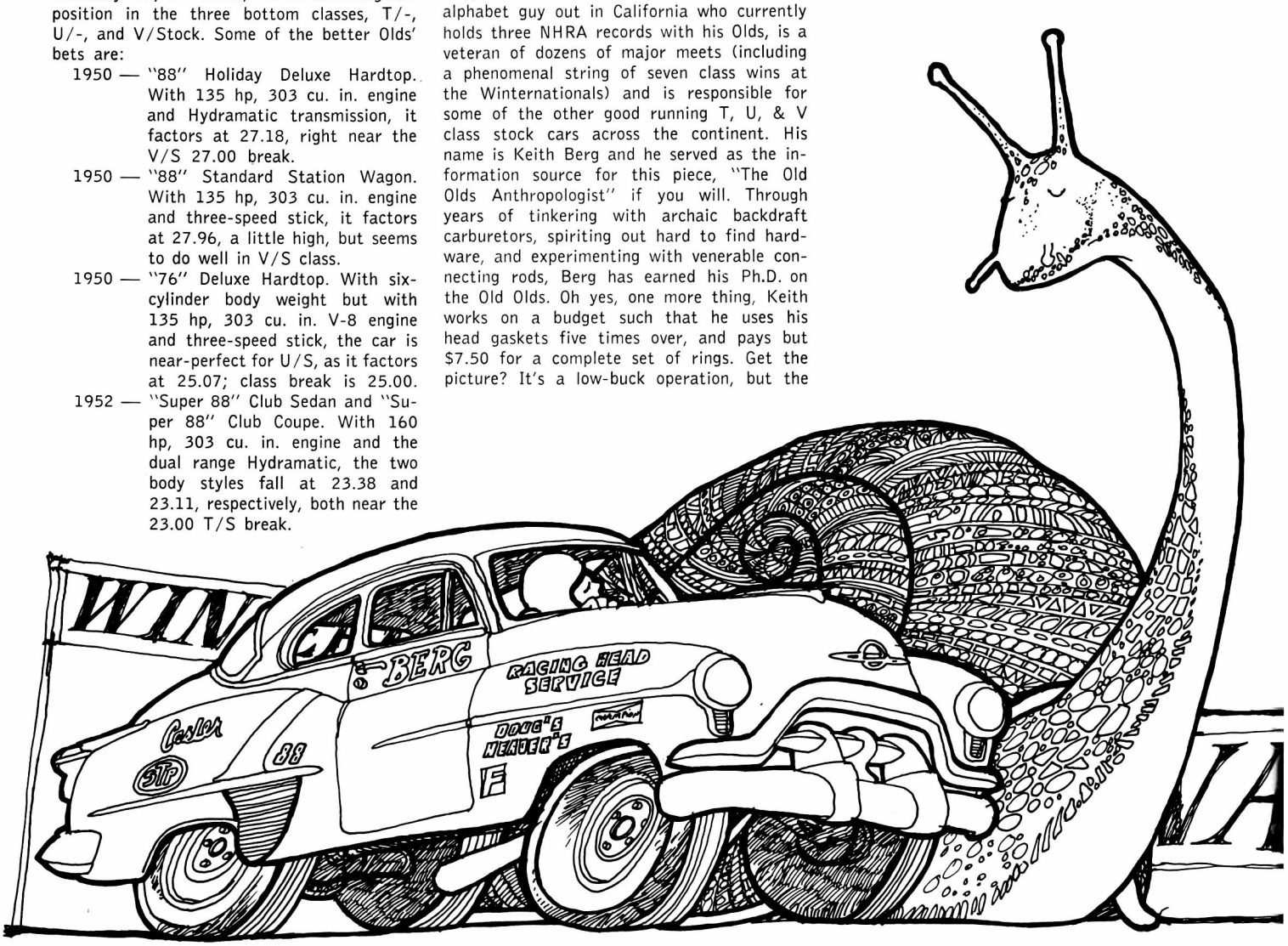

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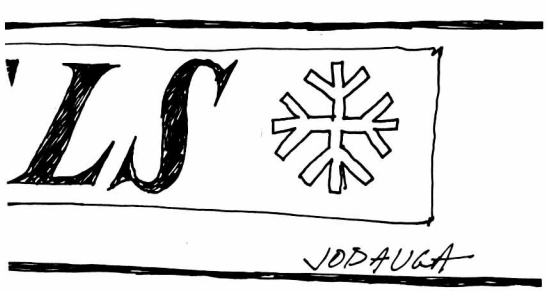

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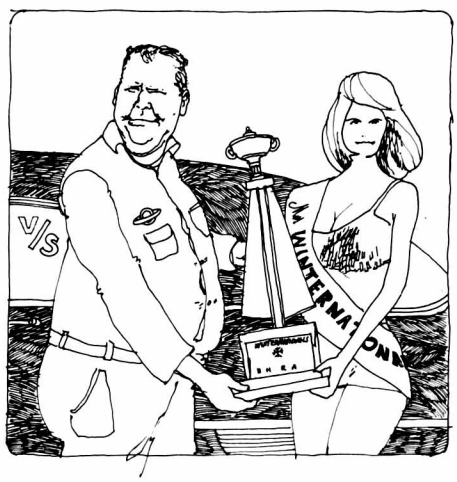

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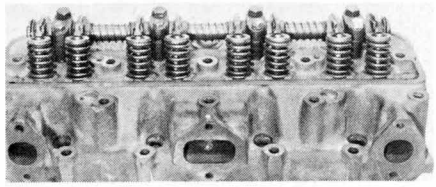
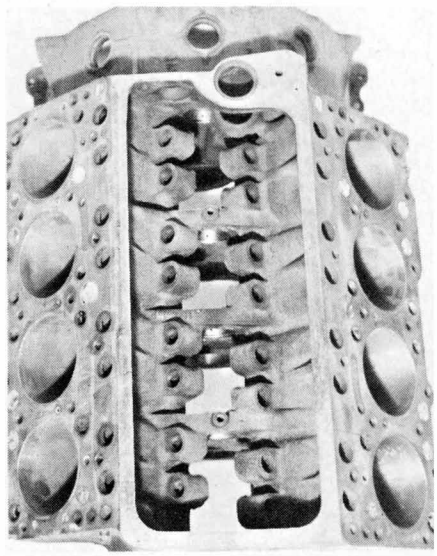
EARLY OLDS

(continued from page 35)

from the Mesozoic era. On the 1949-'50 models, you have a choice of the Carter WGD backdraft (118-66) or the Rochester backdraft (D07002570), which Keith prefers but whose modifications he is rather reluctant to chat about. For the 1951 engines, the Carter two-barrel downdraft may not be as advantageous as using the later four-barrel, as we have previously mentioned. The Rochester four-barrel (700 4800) or the Carter 9325 four-barrel can be used on the 1952 engines, and Keith prefers the latter because of its giant 1 1/16-inch venturis (both primaries and secondaries).





Keith prefers the 1949-'50 cylinder head with the wedge combustion chamber to the 1951-'53 oval chambered heads. The best cylinder block to find is the '49 vintage, as it features a steel retaining plate for the cam. Otherwise, use a '50-53 block.

Additional bolt-on accessories such as ignition (stock distributor with 12-degree curve and a total advance of 36 degrees which comes in at 2600 rpm, used in conjunction with a Mallory transformer), plugs (Champion J4J's), and headers (Doug's 42-inch individuals, with 13-inch extensions for four-barrel carb applications) complete the engine picture. Essentially the engine should run in the neighborhood of $650 including all parts, pieces, and specialty labor that must be farmed out (such as crank work, boring, boiling, and balancing, the latter of which was handled by Bill Hitchcock of Long Beach).

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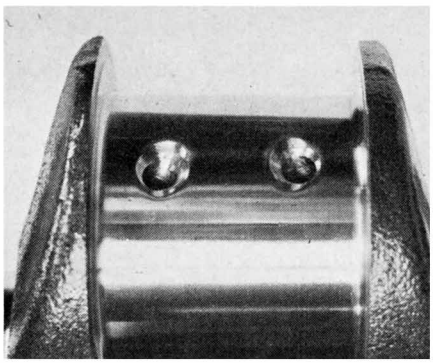
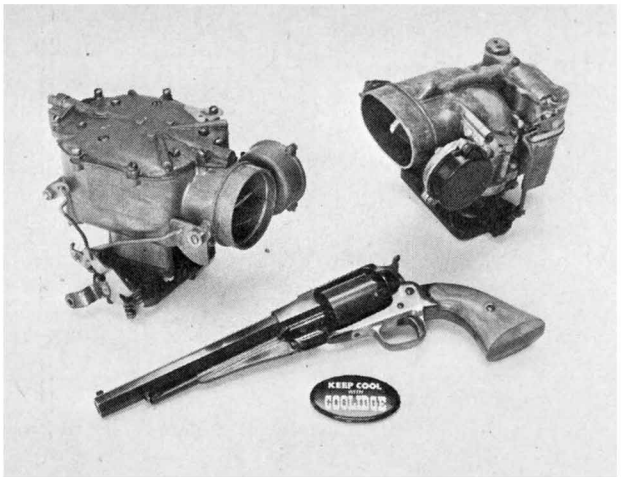
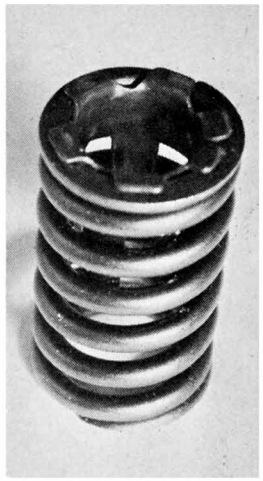
PHOTOS BY TERRY COOK



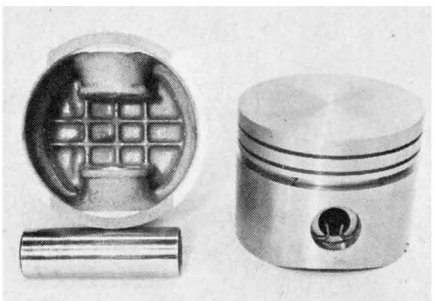
In addition to straightening crank and cutting journals .010 under, Reath put an approximate .030 chamfer in oil holes.



We're not trying to tell you these backdraft carburetors are old, but . . . Carter WGD 118-66 at right and Rochester D07002570 were found in a pyramid on a recent dig.



Be sure to include the harmonic shim in top of spring for tension check.



Jahns cast pistons are used because of their good quality for low price. Note how Tru-Arcs are put in with eyes down.

Additional expenses which will be incurred are the cost of the car ($10 to $50 if you scratch around), a Schiefer clutch and Hurst Line-Loc and shifter combination (if utilizing a three-speed), a 4.30 or 4.56 Twin-Pull Positraction unit (Auburn Manufacturing, Auburn, Indiana), plus a set of 8.50 x 14 Goodyears. A tip for three-speed manual transmission users: replacing the brass shifting boot with one machined of steel is a necessity. For hydramatic users, Keith feels that racing with a cold hydro takes an automatic .10-second off your e.t., so don't let the car sit with the engine shut off for extended periods of time just prior to an important race (but keep the manifold iced). Keith also feels that excessive beefing of the hydro can be detrimental to performance, because the engine has such a low horsepower output. (Note: B&M Automotive of Hydro-Stick fame reports that as long as the main line oil pressure of the transmission is not adjusted too high,

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EARLY OLDS

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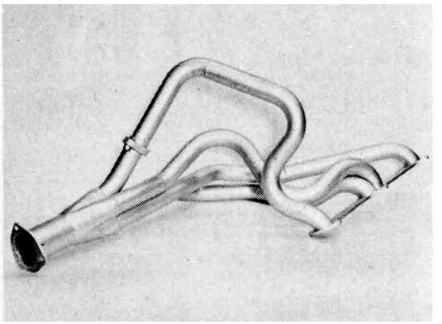
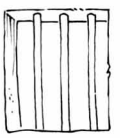
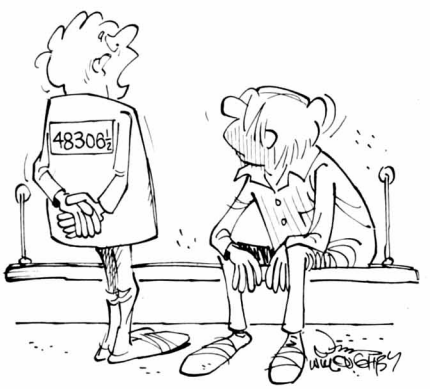
that this "choking" of the engine will not be a factor, regardless of the low hp output). One last bit of advice: Keith feels that perfect front end alignment and wheel balancing is important, because, on the low power Olds, every little bit helps.



Headers are Doug's 42-inch individuals, which Keith recommends. Currently, Doug is the only old Olds header builder.

So that's about it. Excluding your own labor, you can build yourself a winning race car for under $1000, even a potential NHRA record holder. The important thing is to watch your pennies and spend your money wisely. Fifteen-second elapsed times may not make your hair stand on end, but the whole idea is to go racing to win, something many faster car owners fail to do. Yes, the "old Olds" may be rather slow by modern day standards, but after you look at it for a while, it's not really so ugly . . . it's almost homely.





"Everyone is out grabbin' up old vintage bodies. But the one I grabbed up was parked at the corner of Spring and Main!"