

# LAP 4, RACING OLD CARS

**D**id you know there are two different philosophies in racing early Mustangs? One is commonly referred to as "Racing Old Cars" and the other is called "Vintage Racing." It's important to understand the differences in each before you build a dedicated track car because the path you choose can be expensive and time consuming to change later. "Racing Old Cars" means applying new technology to an early chassis in pursuit of improved performance. "Vintage Racing" is the idea of reproducing a '60's racecar while optimizing performance using parts similar to those available during the period. Many people find, as they learn more about their car and better understand what they truly enjoy about it, that the "vintage" aspect is more important than the "racing." With a properly prepared "vintage racecar" you can be just as fast as those that are "racing old cars."

"Racing Old Cars" requires accepting the compromises and cost of modifying an early car in an attempt to match the performance of modern technology. Stuffing a stroked motor and big brakes in your early car is easy to do and may make it feel fast but most of the time results in a "point and shoot" car, one that accelerates and stops well but cannot carry substantial speed through and out of the corners. On the track, you won't make many friends with a "point and shoot" car as drivers struggle to outrun you down the straights and then pull up tight to your rear as you tiptoe around corners. "Vintage Racing" requires accepting that both the supply of parts and allowed modifications are limited. Vintage racing is about the car, not the driver. Think of it as a rolling car show in which the "car is the star" and the driver is just performing the required role.

A competitive racecar is the result of numerous compromises. When building a vintage racecar, compromises are compounded because you can't use modern parts. Building a car under the "racing old cars" philosophy is much easier to do since you can obtain what you need by just picking up the phone or visiting a website. It's far easier to thumb through a modern performance catalog and select the items you "hope" will make the car faster. Beware of reading the catalog and believing manufacturers performance claims without real information. Modifying your car and improving it's performance is a very satisfying experience. There is nothing like the satisfaction received after waiting months for the track time to test

a handling change you've made and then being rewarded on the first hot lap with a vastly improved car. It's very addictive.

Great debates are held when discussing "who's car is faster" so it's always important to remember the context of the discussion. Are we talking about an old car that is raced or a vintage racecar? Today, the vintage standard is defined at the Monterey Historic Races held in August of each year. Many cars apply for entry but only a select few are admitted as the standard is held very high to ensure all cars are as authentic as possible. At Monterey, you'll see laptimes comparable to modern cars accomplished with real 289 engines running stock rocker arms and suspensions. Yes, to do this requires special effort but it's usually rewarded in the end with higher market values. Most cars that run in Monterey have actual race history which inflates their value, but your car, prepared with a "vintage racing" philosophy will have more value in the long run when compared with a similar car prepared for "racing old cars." Keep this in mind as you move forward and make decisions.

So how do I begin to adopt this philosophy? Attend a few events, look at the racecars while keeping an eye out for similarities and differences. Ask yourself, why is that guy running an aftermarket distributor and yet his competitor is not? After all, both cars appear to perform similarly? Try to adopt a critical attitude for change, if the part or modification isn't guaranteed to improve performance then do without it. Focus on something else, try make you car reliable and as fast as possible without adding aftermarket parts. Ask questions, most racers will be glad to help you where they can. Tell them about your car and explain your goals with it but most importantly keep an open mind. Understand the differences between opinion and fact while making sure the information your receiving is understood. Don't question proven solutions just implement them as it's likely the originator is unavailable for comment and the history of the invention has changed over time. If it's a proven, solution, just do it.

When you need to buy parts, take the time to see if you can accomplish the goal with an original piece or by slightly modifying an original part. A simple radiator bracket makes a good example. Most racecars benefit from the increased heat transfer capacity of an aftermarket aluminum radiator so they are commonly seen in the engine bay. But you have a choice when installing the radiator,

you can use the manufacturers mounting kit or you can modify an original Ford piece to work. The radiator takes much less time to install with the kit but a modified original piece will certainly look better in the long run. Another item is valve covers where you can easily obtain reproduction R-model valve covers instead of something with a manufacturers logo. These are easy places to start and they are not performance enhancing but they do begin to set the tone for your car.

Performance items are totally different. Aluminum aftermarket cylinder heads are great performance enhancements. They're reliable, lightweight and produce fantastic power but they're illegal in vintage racing. If you're not vintage racing you should consider them because the positives far outweigh the negatives. Just understand that later, as you become more comfortable with your car and begin to understand going fast isn't just about making horsepower you may long for a correct set of high flowing cast iron heads. Serious horsepower and torque can be made using period correct cast iron heads. Wouldn't you prefer to make your car more vintage than modified? Remember, we're talking road racing not drag racing so horsepower isn't how you win the game. It's about the total package.

If you adopt this philosophy in every modification you make, you'll wind up with a car that "looks" more correct and others will respect the extra effort. Remember, fancy aftermarket parts are a bold statement but sometimes it's more fun to be stealthy fast and beat the other guy with "stock" parts. A great way to see first hand the differences between "racing old cars" and "vintage racing" is to attend races sanctioned by the

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