

A RAIL BY ANY NAME...

Call it Dragster, Slingshot, Thingie, etc., this is still a wild set of rails

Text and Photos by Peter Sukalac

WITH THE major interest in Northwest dragging machinery now turning to the gas classes it's only natural that Tom DeLon of Portland, Oregon and Chuck Blanchard of Beaverton, Oregon turned to the biggest and strongest mill they could obtain when they designed their new Open Gas rig. After checking the specs on all available mills of over 300 inches, they selected a '56 Packard to do their hauling chores. Much, much lighter than the Chrysler and only a few pounds heavier than the Cad the big 374 inch Packard looked great with its stock 2 inch intake valves and 1 3/4 inch exhausts. Careful probing proved that the Packard block carried plenty of meat around its bores, making it safe to go over four-hundred inches if need be.

The engine was left with its stock 4 1/8 inch bore and 3 1/2 inch stroke to begin with, though, and work was concentrated

Packard mill has 374 cubes. Howard F5 cam and tubular pushrods, Roto-Faze ignition, lightened and balanced crankshaft assembly and 6-pot Crower manifold help big engine wind out.

Blanchard gas welds the transmission mounts for frame. Very sturdy double-tube frame is beautifully constructed. The bolt-in type engine and gearbox mounts permit experimental changes.

on making the mill eager to go. The heads were ported to the limits of the gasket openings to allow for the easiest breathing. Then the combustion chambers were routed out and given a mirror finish. The big valves were undercut, polished and installed in the heads with dual valve springs. The piston-crank assembly was balanced before being assembled into the short block. The piston clearance on installation was .012 to allow for free action at any rpm. A Howard F5 cam was selected by DeLon for the heart of the valve train. The cam's .465 lift and excellent competition record appealed to him. A set of special Howard tubular pushrods and mechanical mushroom tappets was installed when the heads were bolted to the block. Battery ignition was planned for the engine using a Roto-Faze distributor and dual coils. A six-pot intake system was constructed for the en-

gine using Ford 48's and Crower logs.

A good engine can't do its best unless it's mounted in an equally good set of rails, so when Chuck began building with torch and tube he vowed no effort or expense would be spared to provide the same. From past experience Chuck knew that rigidity was of the utmost importance. Therefore, a truss type of chassis was laid out. Two inch tubing with 1/16 inch wall was jugged into position and the side rails bridged with the same material. A Ford tube axle was mounted on the front of the chassis using a '34 front spring and an adjustable perch. A '40 Ford rear axle casing was joined to a Cook straddle mount and the assembly used to locate the driver's squirrel cage. A pair of torsion bars were used to suspend the rear axle housing. To insure against axle breakage and possible accidents Chuck had special shafts made from '57 Chev 3/4

ton truck axles. These were fitted with Cook safety hubs. Rubber mounts were used when the engine was bolted to the rails. A Packard side-shift box, running second and high gears only, was bolted directly to the differential using a stub torque tube and adaptor. The usual dragster practice of no brakes up front was followed when the front hubs were mounted. The Ford brakes at the rear were exchanged for Bendix Aircraft units. Franklin center steering was bolted to the frame cage that surrounds the driver's seat. Drag link and radius rods were made from light tubing.

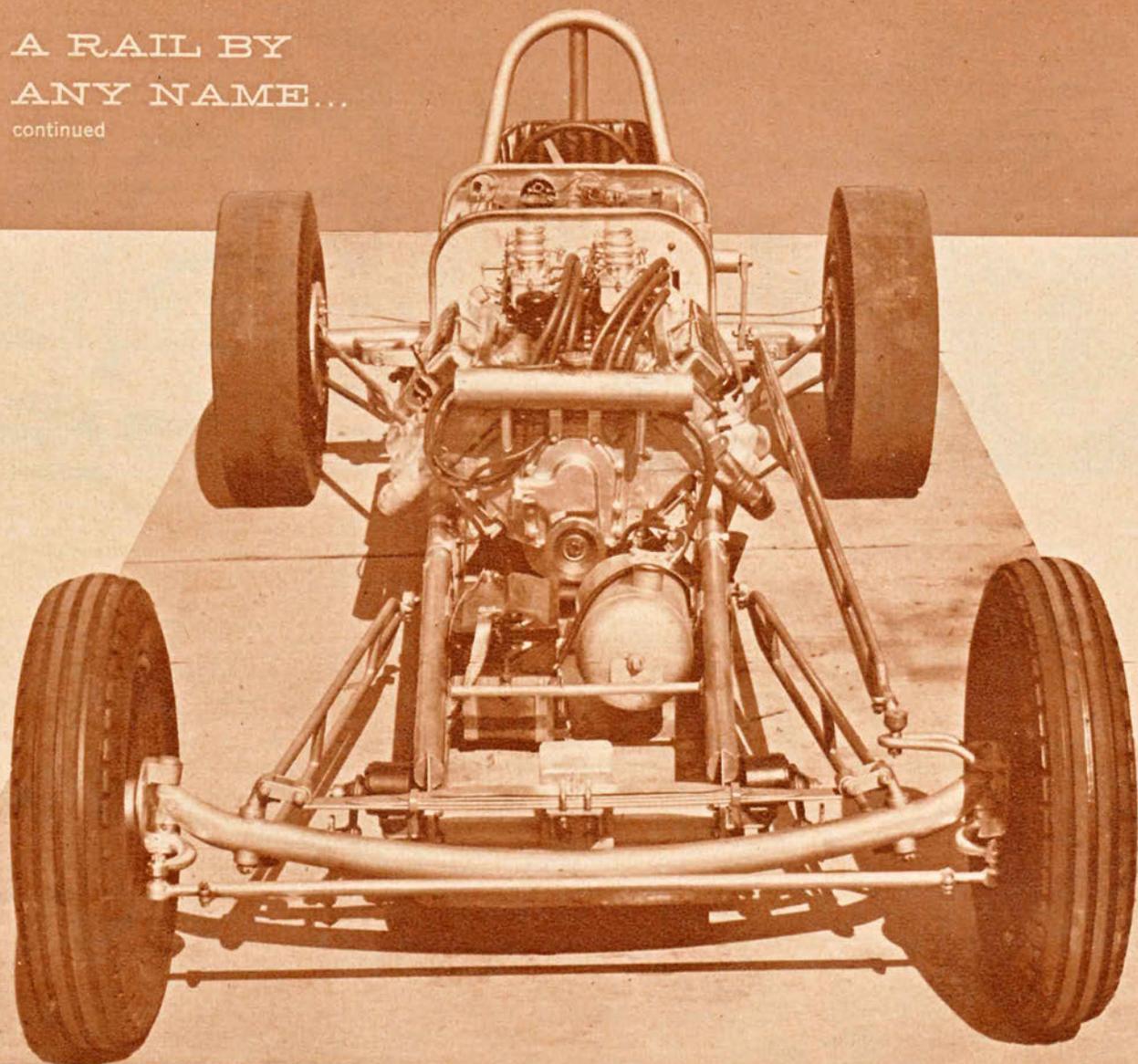
A warm-up run, using stock ignition was tried as soon as the car was far enough along. The best time with the limited rpm range permitted by the ignition was 123. Not bad! With a streamlined hood and the high revs forthcoming with hot ignition the car will find the 140's a more likely mark.

Sleek streamlined shell is being constructed. Double-tube drag link should be free from excessive whip, assuring the car's handling.

Crew members of Blanchard and DeLon dragster, here pondering over that ever-present plug heat range problem, make a striking pit scene, wear matched outfits.

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continued



Very flat spring is reworked '34 Ford, controls action of Ford tube axle. To gain necessary tie-rod clearance, spindles were reversed.

Rear end of car is suspended on fully adjustable torsion bars made up from old Model A driveshafts. A 4000 pound Albro 11 inch clutch is used to transmit engine torque to the big slicks.

Side rails are 2 inch seamless tubing, truss members are of 1 inch chrome moly. 3 inch crossmember bolts on, mounts adjustable spring perch. Fuel line has a remote shut-off valve.

