

# Underground Derby Disaster Con't

wasn't there. The keg of Pabst wasn't cooperating. It required minutes of tinkering to produce even a single cup, half full of light beer and half pure foam, beer flavored bubbles that couldn't get a puppy drunk.

The warm-ups to the event grew redundant. At first the site and sound of a town car drifting over gravel and making trash-ing sounds all the way caught attention. Practically anyone who wanted to was welcome for a spin, a chance to take out one of these corpses of great American engineering and thrash them about like a shark tearing at some unfortunate sea mammal. The cars spat up rocks that glowed like hot lava in the tail lights. People were tempted, but as was seen earlier, any instance of recreational driving could turn into a scene out of Mad Max. A curious spectator could very well end up being the main event.

The erratic driving was getting old. "No more adolescent displays of masculinity please," an observer said. But the old truck was apparently still broken, and a team of experts was working on it tirelessly. They wanted this thing to happen more than anyone.

There was no formal starting, and no explanation of the rules. There was no point system. People assumed that the last car running would be presumed winner, whatever that entailed. That was the last car still fixable, not the last car to break down. But with no actual prize it was really more about how you played the game.

All four cars started up spontaneously. Most of the spectators left the campfire for higher ground. A central mound gave an overhead view to the entire arena as well as protection from the tons of metal that soon came sliding around corners and smashing into one another. The crowd lit up with the first crash. With ever crunch and smack of breaking metal came cheering and incoherent shouting. Cans of Bud Light were raised up to toast. The vehicles chased one another around the back of the mound, spitting up rocks and mud all the way. And the sound of the crash was unmistakable. You could hear every nut and bolt of the cars rattling looser as the steel behemoths crashed into one another again and again.

The younger and more enthusiastic spectators ran back and forth from one end of the high ground to the other, not wanting to miss a single moment of the mayhem. Everybody was smiling, and it almost felt safe. No one was over drunk. The drivers didn't have eye protection or gloves, but they wore seat belts and motor cycle helmets. The passengers didn't. And don't ask why there were passengers. There just were. Some were highly dedicated mechanics. Others just wanted to be closer to the action.

After twenty minutes or so, vehicles started to break down. Sparks spat out from under the hood of one. Others ran a flat. The first to go was a sedan. The driver tried to keep the thing going, but everyone knew that something very important had

broken. They could hear grinding metal inside the car as it limped to a halt. Steam bellowed from the hood. But the fight wasn't over, and others took a turn or two to ram wounded beast like lions picking off the wounded animals in a herd.

Near the end of the carnage vehicles slammed into one another in reverse, trying to minimize damage to the radiator and everything else that was coming to pieces. The near miss technique became popular again. So did flying at one another at high speed then sliding to a halt and giving the other vehicle little more than a kiss.

The whole crowd roared and drank wildly. No one was bored, and only a few readily knew when was the last time they had this much fun. They'd put off judging until morning. But some felt the whole thing was so wrong in every way. Still, in the mean time, with blood and beer pumping, with burning gas and breaking metal, it was hard not to feel like some deeply sheltered, religious kid when they first go off to college and start taking body shots.

But things slowly disintegrated into chaos. Drivers would come around corners to ram broken vehicles. The mechanics would run like hell and dive into the bushes or climb back into the driver's seat if that was the safest place around. Not sure how many times he got his seat belt on before the impact though. There was some kind of illusion of a rule about not hitting doors with people behind them. But that evaporated as the night wore on. Were there no rules at all? Would anyone protest if a passenger lit up a roman candle and began firing it at other vehicles? Anyway, the night grew old, and nerves were raw from the excitement. Most of the vehicles had been resurrected numerous times and their days were numbered.

"Let's drag that car up to the top of the cliff and push it off," a spectator said anxiously.

"We should light it on fire first," said another.

"Okay, first just let me finish my beer," was the response. The cars all seemed beyond saving. The night was falling silent again. Then, from the top of a seventy foot cliff not too far off, a good sized log came tumbling down. Damn, just when people were starting to lose hope of anything else crazy and dangerous happening

the damn town car launched off down the cliff. The interior had been set ablaze with gasoline. At the bottom, a great fireball engulfed the car in moments. Next the van came. It wasn't on fire, but the thing tumbled over and over, and made a much louder crash at the bottom.

"Holy shit! There was someone in that," a voice called out. An edge of fear cut through everything, as if the whole silly fantasy suddenly felt very real. But it was all a misunderstanding. This time, instead of the

truck pushing the beast over, a driver accelerated and jumped out at the last minute. His leg had caught some sharp piece of broken metal, but he broke free mere feet in front of the giant cliff.

The burning and smashing of cars continued for nearly another hour. Great plumes of black and white smoke trailed off in the wind. Metal, glass, and chunks of plastic lay strewn across the ground. What a toxic and messy business. The

cars glowed white hot where people had thrown bowling balls into the fire. The beer was starting to wear off, and all anyone was left with was whiskey. Noting about the scene was okay. Many just wanted to go home before daylight brought even the slightest possibility of anyone's arrival.

Anyone who saw the scene before them in full sunlight would no doubt invoke some kind of primal rage. And if they recognized a name or license plate number then someone was going to be crucified before environmentalist everywhere. They'd probably be publicly euthanized as some kind of culturally retarded throwback to the earlier days of the twentieth century, not worth saving.

A shuttle had taken people home earlier, so the caravan was smaller. No one wanted to drive back on the highway after a night like that. The winding back roads were a must. This meant skilled driving, over and around giant rocks, through mud and swamps, over logs and neglected dirt roads. Passengers in the bed of a pickup truck took quite a flogging from branches as punishment for their night of decadence.

There was a young man in the back of the truck, with a plaid shirt and short, wild hair. At the start of the night he was excited. His eyes were filled with a youthful enthusiasm seen in college freshmen on their way to a kegger or a blue color beer guzzler on his way to a football game. That look was gone from his eyes. He was tired, demoralized, beat from a full night of danger and lunacy far from the help of hospitals and warm beds. He wanted to go home. Most of them did.

The sun would come up soon, but most of the contenders seemed ready to start another day. Forget breakfast. They'd have another beer and fill up their gas tanks.