

Ron Harper & the 1990 Regional Meet Car Games

By Ron Harper

With Martin Harding

Ron Harper loved people, Model A Fords and the meets that combined them. He especially liked playing car games. Ron and I teamed up on many occasions and won several events over the years. Sometimes we beat the younger guys that should have been able to move faster and more easily. What Ron and I had going for us was a desire to win and a way of extracting a lot of fun out of an activity no matter what it was.

This was all illustrated during the Regional Meet car games held at the Inn at the Seventh Mountain in 1990. Our usual routine was to show up early and watch each game, looking for an edge on the other teams. This year it was serious. The Brost brothers from Portland were in the mix of competitors and they were always good. They were also young, fast and agile. Ron and I were all of those things.....once upon a time.

The first game was to drive your car 50 feet, stop the engine and both driver and passenger had to run over and put on some coveralls. Once dressed, the team was to restack nine 2 x 4's, remove the coveralls and drive the car across the finish line. We studied and verbally rehearsed each move until we had it down cold. It was time to play!

There was a long line of cars waiting to play all the games and that allowed our brains to either lose focus or at least wander to the edge of the envelope. Ron commented that our wind breakers would make it harder to put on the coveralls. Off came the coats. We both looked at our shoes. Off came the shoes. Neither of us wanted to ruin our socks on the asphalt so it was off with the socks. The line was still long but we were moving up slowly. The adrenaline was starting to cloud our judgment more than normal. I mentioned our shirts, like the coats, would hamper us a bit. Off they came and the 'T' shirts followed immediately. This entire time, Ron had mentioned he wished he had his swimming trunks so he could jettison his jeans. A friend always encourages a friend. I agreed with his assessment of the jeans being another restriction. "You are wearing skivvies aren't you" I asked. He was. I reminded him they were just white cotton swim trunks you would not want to get wet. After quite a bit of discussion about this matter and public decency and the desire to win this game, a decision was made.

By this time we had arrived near the head of the line. Rod Frakes, a retired OSU professor and a proper gentleman from our club was explaining the game to each entrant. He walked up to my car. Normally not one to use strong language, he could not control his shock at what he saw. His actual quote was “oh my word” as he turned away from the view only he could see fully. What he was dealing with was the human embodiment of the Foster Farms chickens without most of their feathers. The frames, skin color and the functioning brain size were all very similar to the chickens seen in the TV commercials.

After Rod composed himself and did his job, we were primed and ready to play. The car leaped forward and skidded to a stop, all in one motion. The doors flew open and out we came, running like chickens pursued by a fox. The crowd of onlookers, helped maintain this theme by letting out sounds of shock and terror at the sight. The crowd had to look because you couldn't look away. Nothing so pasty white and fast had ever been seen by most. The coveralls were donned, the boards restacked, the coveralls removed and in a flash (pun?) we were in the car and across the finish line. The crowd was not finished with their reactions and continued to whistle, howl and cheer the most shocking yet entertaining display of legal behavior they had ever seen.

The remaining car games confined us to inside the car and were uneventful but we were greeted with smiles, cheers and shaking heads all along the route. We knew we had put in a good effort but did not recognize fully what we had accomplished.

The awards banquet at the end of each regional meet is rather formal. Prizes for the show cars and for the era fashions are foremost on the minds of the serious members. Lots of money and time is spent honing the details of their entry and it should be recognized by all those in attendance and homage paid. This was all done in due course but the car games also had to be dealt with. Ron and I were called to the stage without explanation. With both of us standing in front of the crowd, the master of ceremonies then explained a video camera was recording the car games. The crowd was restless. The camera happened to be at the wrong game at the wrong time to document all the graphic detail, but it did show the first car game in the background. The MC told everyone to ignore the game in the foreground and focus on the small car, quite distant behind them.

The entire banquet room went wild. Everyone had heard about us but only a privileged few had really experienced our game performance (I think there might be a chicken pun in there). The video showed enough of Ron exploding out of the car in his tidy whites and his sprint around the car in both directions as well as the crowd's reactions. After the video when it had quieted down, the MC gave us the first prize. We also were awarded the coveralls used in the game, with the stern suggestion we use them.

That was fun with my friend, Ron Harper.

Martin Harding