

8th Annual National Track Motorcar Championships

By Wayne Monger

The sound of Fairmont motorcars putt-putting around the trackage of the Portola Railroad Museum filled the air for the eighth year in a row on the first Saturday of August 1991. Participants and spectators nearly filled the parking lot to witness the 8th Annual National Track Motorcar Championships (NTMC) that started just after 1 PM on August 3, 1991. This year, 20 motorcars of various types, plus a six-person "rail-bike" were involved in the NTMC.

Being similar in format to the U.S. National Handcar Races held every September in Old Sacramento, the NTMC uses a 976-foot (300-meter) length of museum track to allow one car at a time to run for the best time of three tries. This year at Portola, the NTMC was broken down into five different categories for the participating motorcars to run in. These "classes" consisted of the following:

- Class A Cars with 1-piston motors (mostly Fairmont M-series and S-series cars)
- Class B Cars with 2-piston, 2-cycle motors (cars with Fairmont "AA" motors)
- Class C Cars with 2-piston, 4-cycle motors (cars with Onan engines)
- Class D Cars with 1-piston or 2-piston motors with rubber tires.
- Class E Cars with larger than 2-piston motors being operated for exhibition only or alternate-powered cars.

As in the past, the "Class A" was the most crowded and saw the most cars that have participated in past NTMCs. There were eight cars in this class this year, and a ninth that had been signed up but did not show. Bob Mahan of Ventura, Calif. returned to 1st place this year with his S-2 with a time of 33.06 seconds. Bob had been 1st in 1987, 2nd in 1989 and 3rd last year. 2nd place went to Ron Allen of Carson City, Nev. on his Fairmont S-2 with a time of 33.93 seconds. Ron had taken 1st place in 1989 and another 2nd place last year. 3rd place was taken by NTMC chairman Wayne Monger with his Fairmont M-19 with a time of 40.31 seconds, the first time he has placed higher than 4th in all eight years the NTMC has been run. Other participants in the Class A were 4th place winner John Bailie of Citrus Heights, Calif. on his M-19, 5th place winner Errol Spangler of Sunnyvale, Calif. on his S-2, 6th place winner Steve Bush of Auburn, Calif. on his M-19E, 7th place winner Paul Jarmusz of Rohnert Park, Calif. with his beautifully restored M-9 and last place went to first year participant Milon Thorley of El Dorado, Calif. on his M-19.

The "Class B" this year consisted of only one participant, mainly due to FRRS member Hank Stiles' Fairmont ST-2-AA having failed the day before the motorcar races. First place this year in this class went to William Kaminsky of Grand Terrace, Calif. and his M-19-AA with a best time of 31.27 seconds. This repeats his 1st place of 1990. Bill was also very instrumental in the success of this year's NTMC, as he is the organizer of the new Western Railway Motorcar Owners and Operators (WryMoo) that many of the motorcar owners now belong to, plus Bill provided the excellent electronic timer that was used for the first time this year at Portola. Thanks, Bill!

The "Class C" continues to be the most closely matched of any class, shown this year by the fact that all six cars involved had best times that fell within a span of three and a few hundredths seconds between 1st and last place. 1st place went to Glen Hansen of Chico, Calif. operating FRRS member Terry Decottignies' Fairmont MT-19 with a winning time of 30.33 seconds. In an unusual twist, 2nd place went to Terry Decottignies of Chico, Calif. operating Vic Neves' MT-19 car, coming across with a time of 31.93 seconds. Vic this year was busy video taping the entire event and helping Gary Cousin announce the NTMC event. 3rd place went to first year participant Gil Dominguez of Fair Oaks, Calif. and his MT-19 with a time of 32.57 seconds. Other participants in Class C were 4th place winner Bob Beattie (Team Mallory) of Carson City, Nevada with his MT-19, 5th place winner Scott and Bill Vogel of Hayward, Calif. with

their MT-19 and 6th place winner Tom Gerald of Weaverville, Calif. and his MT-14. FRRS members Dave and Julie Anderson did not operate their MT-14 this year as they were helping in the operation of the NTMC.

There were the same three participants in the "Class D" category again in 1991. 1st place in this category again this year went to Gary Mitchell of Cathedral City, Calif. and his futuristic "Space Raller" prototype motorcar. Powered by a one-cylinder motorcycle motor and riding on rubber tires, this car had the best time of 22.19 seconds. 2nd place went to last year's 3rd place winner Gary Boots of Paradise, Calif. with his Fairmont MT-19A with rubber tires getting a time of 27.90 seconds. 3rd place went to Tom Mercer of Sacramento, Calif. with a time of 28.70 seconds on his MT-19A.

In 1991, the decision was made to limit the use of any large motorcars with larger than 2-cylinder motors to an exhibition class ("Class E"), both for the safety of the spectators and the operators. Some of these cars in the past have exceeded 45 mph in this short stretch of museum trackage while most other motorcars have a difficult time reaching 35 mph during the NTMC. Once again this year, "Team Mallory Electric" from Carson City, Nevada came to operate and show off their restoration work on the FRRS "Gang Car" M-44 (equipped with a "souped-up" Ford V-8) and the A-3 car equipped with a 4-cylinder Waukesha. Thanks go to Bob Beattie and the other people of "Team Mallory Electric" for the sometimes awesome display of overpowered motorcars on rails!

A special entry arrived just before the start of the NTMC this year. Mark Norstad of Greenbrae, Calif. entered his "Paragon machine" (6-person powered rail cycle) into the exhibition class. The times of this rail cycle were well matched with that of many of the other motorcars, with their best time coming in at 34.72 seconds. This was also a crowd pleaser.

Each year, the NTMC could not be put on without the efforts of some of our fellow FRRS members. Some of the people we need to thank for their efforts this year are Bob Lindley, Ed Warren, Julie Anderson, Gary Cousin, Pat Cousin, Renee McComb, Gordon Wollesen, Dave Anderson, Vic Neves, Andy Thomas, Norm Holmes and of course, Hap Mani. A few of the FRRS members that have participated or helped out in the last NTMCs were not in Portola this time, as long time member Dave McClain had chosen this day to get married in Colfax. Congratulations, Dave!

Following the end of the races and the awards ceremony at 4:30 PM, many of the motorcar owners gave free rides to museum visitors until it got dark. The picnic Bar-B-Q dinner for the motorcar people was a great success again at the museum's fine picnic area near Milward switch. With everyone rapidly fading, some of the people headed for the Flannery Room for a few hours of videos and slides dealing with past motorcar meets and runs.

On Sunday August 15, 1991, 12 of the motorcars from the previous day headed for Chester, Calif. and the Almanor Railroad. For the third year in a row, the FRRS (in conjunction with WryMoo this year) had gotten permission for a motorcar run on the 13-mile long Almanor Railroad from owner Collins Pine Company. In all, almost 50 people got to experience the curvy and scenic Almanor Railroad from Chester to Clear Creek Jct. and return. It was noted on traveling over the Almanor Railroad that many of the rail joints show evidence of the heavy electric bonds required when this was the electrified mainline of the Red River Lumber Company in the early 1920's plus some of the side tracks on the railroad are still laid with 60-lb rail dating from the 1880's (some are stamped "C.P.R.1").

We hope that everyone will return next year to the NTMC on the first Saturday of August.

If you have a motorcar and are not yet a member of WryMoo, contact:

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