

A TRIUMPHANT RETURN

BRINGING NITRO
BACK TO THE MASSES



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It was a photographer's dream and a racer's nightmare. And before there ever was a Frantic Ford, there was the Frantic Four, and that's not a misprint.

The team of Norm Weekly, Ron Rivero, Jim Fox and Dennis Holding were a force to be reckoned with in the 1960s landscape of drag racing. In the late '60s, one of the most recognizable fuel dragsters to be immortalized in print was campaigned by the team. Virtually every photo of this car showed Weekly powering into a giant wheelstand with the front tires slightly tilted and smoke billowing off of the rear slicks. The team blazed a trail far and wide and were rewarded with numerous victories with eventually Rivero gaining seat time and proving himself quite capable at the controls.

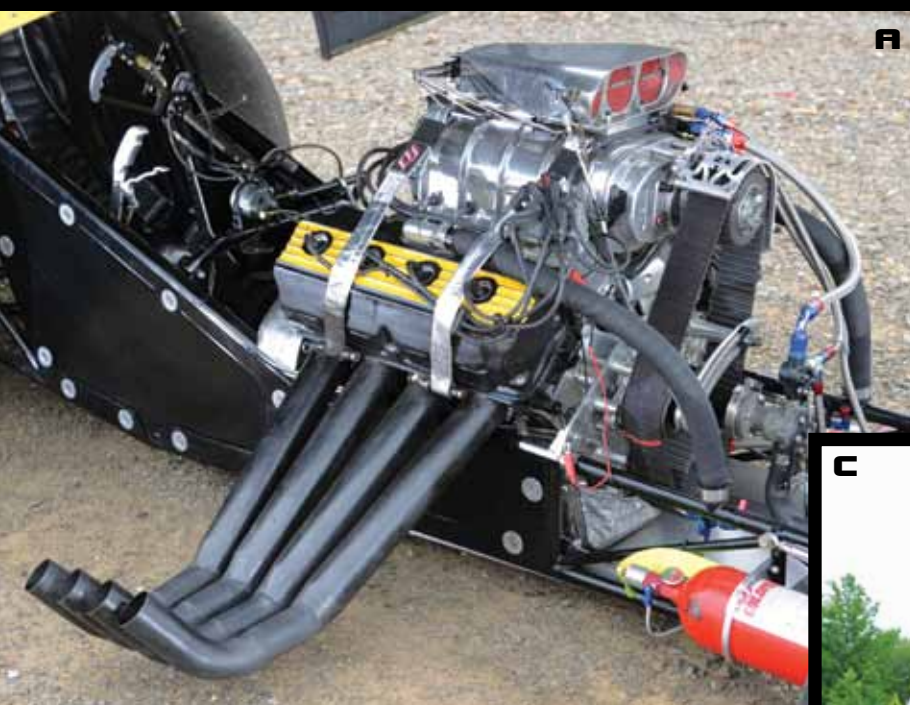
By 1969, the Funny Car movement had begun to really take hold and Jim Fox figured that a switch was imminent, and so was the name. With a Ford Mustang body draped over an S&W Race Cars-built tube chassis, the Frantic Ford quickly established itself as a certifiable contender up and down the east coast. Its list of drivers included Ron Rivero (up to 1970), Sarge Arciero ('71-72), "Rapid Roy" Harris ('72-73) and, finally, Dodger Glenn ('74-78).

The most successful years were '75-77 when owner Jim Fox brought partner Freddy Frey into the mix. With a fresh influx of cash from Frey and the talented Dodger Glenn behind the wheel, the team was almost unbeatable at the many match races run during that period.

FRANTIC FORD

Comin at ya! The new Frantic Ford has been a hit with fans.

Original Frantic Ford owner Jim Fox is alive and well living in California. His blessing to recreate the car was all Pirrone needed to bring the dream to life.



A



B



C

A. With a period-correct 413-cubic-inch Hemi powered by nitromethane, the new Frantic Ford has been hitting the match-race trail last year with a complete 2014 schedule set to compete with other recreated nitro cars such as Bruce Larson's USA-1, the ATI Black Magic and others.

B. Everything from the body right down to the wheels and M&H Racemaster slicks available from Coker Tire were used to give the build that old-school look.

C. The new Frantic Ford uses a Steve Grunewald-built chassis underneath a '69 Mustang fiberglass body, also built by Grunewald.



With the numerous cars Rocky Pirrone (center) has built and continue to race, bringing in extra drivers is a necessity. Two of his drivers are Judy Mac (left) and Michelle Feil (right).

In July of 1978, during a second-round match at Maple Grove Raceway in Pennsylvania, Dodger suffered an engine explosion and a subsequent crash, which claimed his life at the age of 33. The news affected the entire drag-racing community, but Dodger's memory still lives on in the hearts of the fans and all that knew him. It was decided at this time by all parties involved to close the door on their Funny Car racing for the foreseeable future.

As a nine-year-old kid back in the day, Rocky Pirrone not only helped Fox with between-round maintenance but also watched as his late father Joe build the transmissions for the team.

Pirrone says, "As a young kid, I was always excited when I saw the cars back then. With my dad racing the Boss Hydro AA/GS car, I literally grew up with those cars. Now to be able to recreate them is just a thrill."

As the proprietor of Joe Pirrone Transmissions in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Pirrone has a number of cars in his possession; cars which are all models from back in the day. Besides the Frantic Ford nitro car now, Pirrone's collection includes three AA/GS cars; the Boss Hydro, the K.S. Pitman Willys and the Big John Mazmanian Willys. Also in his collection is the Screaming Eagle Funny Car. And lest you think these cars are simply showroom pieces, each of them are driven by a host of drivers at match races all over the country.

Pirrone said, "I always wanted to build the Frantic Ford '69 Funny Car because it was such an iconic car in its day. I had spoken with Jim Fox years ago about building the car but, at the time, there were other issues on my plate and I had to let this pass. Bobby Frey, George Reidnauer and Al Liebmann eventually got the car on track, but in later Mustang II trim. But after running the car, which included several mechanical setbacks along with a health scare for Bobby, they put the car on the

FRANTIC FORD



TOM WEST

With Ron Rivero behind the wheel, the Frantic Ford was a legitimate contender in the '70s regardless of where the team raced.

The owner of three AA/GS cars, such as the Boss Hydro, which is an exact reproduction of the car his late father Joe ran, Rock Pirrone has literally grown up in the sport.

side, which opened the door once again for me.

"We have had a tremendous amount of success bringing the AA/GS cars back to the match-racing circuit," Pirrone added. "Racing those cars before the crowd at last year's U.S. Nationals was a real thrill for everyone. And today there are so many tracks that want to have shows such as this."

The explosion (maybe a poor choice of words) of retro nitro cars has given new life to match racing.

"I spoke again with Jim Fox and he simply wanted us to make sure I spoke with Bobby about it," Pirrone said. "He was ecstatic and Al Liebmann, who was involved with Bobby earlier, came on board with me. I couldn't ask for a better person in Al and we get along great together. I've been successful with the Gassers and we both just want to do the same with the nitro cars. Between the Frantic Ford, Bruce Larson's USA-1, the ATI Black Magic car and others, we're gonna be able to offer tracks an economical show."

"The decision about building this car was made at the Bakersfield Hot Rod Reunion in October of 2012, and by the time the PRI Show rolled around in December of that year, we were well on our way towards getting it done," says Pirrone. "Our plan was to use 2013 to test the waters and before we even had the car done, we had six match race dates booked."

Wanting to recreate the '69 Mustang, Pirrone located a mold for the body in Flori-



da. Pirrone says, "We flew down to Steve Grunewald's shop and he also had a chassis with the right wheelbase so we made the deal for him to finish and mount the body on that chassis which saved us a lot of time. The balance of the build was completed by myself and partner Bill Ellershaw."

The Frantic Ford features a state-of-the-art nostalgia Funny Car chassis with a period-correct body which carries all the necessary up-to-date safety equipment necessary to run at all NHRA and IHRA races. A lot of the parts and pieces on the car are period correct, but with current updates. Besides Ellershaw and Liebmann, Pirrone receives a lot of help from Tom Fox Sr. and Bobby Toth. **DRR**



Who, me? Yeah, him. Frantic Ford partner and head cheerleader Al Liebmann has also been a part of the sport for years. His involvement on the team has been an invaluable assistance for Pirrone.