The History of NMF Racing

By Albert Wentzel (NMF Racing)

I had done a few arrive-and-drives and had so much fun I knew I needed to bring some friends into the LeMons fold. I brought my cousin Eric Gajdos, his neighbor Matt Gould, and my friend Carl Yukawa to one of the races to show them what I wanted to drag them into and they were sold. After all, what's not to like? That race sealed it for everyone. Now we just had to figure what kind of car to build. Eric and I both liked the idea of building something unusual and I have a thing for Ford Falcons so that's what we decided to do. Besides no one had run a Falcon in LeMons yet. We found a less than stellar example and before we knew it we had a car in the garage and started to wonder what we were getting into. Once we dove into it we realized we were in trouble. This car had sat in a field for almost 30 years after being in an accident. The only thing good about it was the shell.

While at work one day I was talking to a customer about the car when he told me he had an older Dodge mini pickup that he would let me have if I wanted to race it. Knowing what kind of truck it was I knew I wouldn't fit inside it for a long race so I thanked him but said no. Later we started talking about it and doing a little research and found out they had the same wheelbase. We decided that we would mount the Falcon shell on the pickup frame. After much work with power tools and torches we had a frame with just the firewall and floor on it and a Falcon shell with no floor or firewall. Things were looking good until we took a good look at what we had. The truck frame had holes big enough to put your hand through. We ended up cutting off the rear frame and I made a new one at the metal fabrication company I work for. We grafted it on what was left of the frame and when that was done we dropped the Falcon shell on. It was the winter of 2012 and our proposed debut at Gingerman in April 2013 was looking in serious jeopardy. If we were going to be in that race we would need a miracle. Then someone threw us a lifeline. Or was it a hangman's noose?

NSF racing was proposing an idea to pass a car around the country for other teams to use. I asked my teammates what they thought of the idea since our hooptie would never be ready in time. They agreed to do it so I signed up to run the infamous K-Car. Before we even got to the race we ran into a problem. Two of my drivers couldn't make the race. The same day I found out I received a text from tSoG telling me that his car wouldn't be ready to run the race and wondered if I would have room for a couple of his arrive-and-drives. The timing was perfect. We took on tSoG too since he always brings bacon.

We really didn't have a clue what we might be getting into since we'd never seen the car but it seemed to be getting a lot of love before the season

The NMF-raced NSF K car at Gingerman.

tSoG, Albert Wentzel, Eric Gajdos, Marc Fuhrman, B.J. Harkness

opener so we thought we'd be in good shape. Gingerman was the third race of the year that the K was scheduled to run in. After she blew her new engine at the season opener I started having concerns. When Team Sputnik had problems at Monticello I started getting really worried. I was still trying to make arrangements for when and where I would take possession of the car. tSoG volunteered to pick the car up from the previous race in New York and deliver it to our garage in Chicago. He got the car back to his place and started working on it. The car got a bad tank of gas and he had to replace the tank and fuel pump and a whole lot of other stuff. His truck blew a u-joint when he was supposed to come to Chicago so instead he kept working on the car and we took delivery of the K at Gingerman Raceway just before tech inspection opened up.

We got the car off the trailer and when I went to move the car over I realized we had no brakes. We quickly got the car up in the air and when we removed the brake pads we found there was nothing but backing pads. The brakes were gone. We put new pads on and did a few other things and passed tech just before they closed at 5:00. We had to fix one thing. They wanted us to remove the antenna because it was just wobbling in the wind. NMF was ready to go racing.

Compared to other teams that ran the K in 2013 we had an uneventful race. We were pitted between our good friends White Trash Racing and Apocalyptic Racing and received a lot of help and moral support from them. White Trash gave us a pair of used racing tires for the front that made a world of difference compared to the all season tires we bought at WalMart. The only problems the K gave us was the brakes and we had to keep putting oil in it. We had a solid race, finishing 38th out of 68. We almost finished in the top half. After the race we tucked the K in at the garage and did a little cleanup on her before we took her down to Rolla (Missouri) and handed her off to the next team.

While we were getting ready to run the K car one of Carl's friends offered to sell us his car if we wanted to run it in LeMons. We had a team meeting and decided to shelve the Falcon for now and buy the '98 VW Jetta and try to get it ready for the next race which was in about six weeks. Eric and Matt started stripping the car and I started ordering parts, starting with the cage. I'm the only team member that knows

At Joliet with the Jetta

how to weld so that created an issue if I couldn't get down to the garage. Eventually we started to realize that there was a chance that we would not be ready for the race. We never really got to work on our theme for the car which was the Day of the Dead. Carl works for one of the largest haunted houses in the Chicago area so he was getting ideas from them and started painting the car but we never really got it done the way we wanted. On the Thursday night before the race we loaded up our partially completed car and got ready to go to Autobahn in Joliet.

Friday morning we pulled into Joliet and unloaded between White Trash and our friends Racing 4 Nickels. I've done arrive and drives with both of these teams and consider them some of my best friends in LeMons. As soon as we unloaded both teams jumped in to try to help us finish the car.

In traffic at Joliet.

When we left the garage our cage was still not done. We didn't have our rear stays in or the spreader plates as well as the horizontal bars for the main hoop. Our harness wasn't mounted either as well as our kill switch or our gauge cluster. We had a lot or work yet to do. We worked all day Friday until it got dark and we were totally burned out. The track is only about 45-50 minutes from my house so once it got dark I headed for home to catch a few hours sleep.

I got back to the track early Saturday morning and got back to work while the rest of the teams got ready for the start of the race. tSoG was racing with us again and had shown up before I got there and started working on the car with us. I have to admit it was rather demoralizing to have the race start and we weren't ready. In fact we didn't finish it and pass tech until the race was over three hours old. Once we were on track none of that mattered. We were racing!

One of the issues we ran into while getting ready for the race was trying to find a decent set of tires in a size that would fit the Jetta's 14" rims. We ended up getting some crappy all season tires just before the race. Now that we were on track we realized what a difference good tires make. We were having a good time but it could be a handful at times. We earned a couple of black flags but nothing serious. We all had a good time and once Matt took the checkered flag it was time to start the party. The car had run flawlessly so there wasn't anything to do except have a few cold ones and get ready for day two.

Sunday morning dawned and we were actually

Pitting at Road America.

ready for the start of the race. Our first driver went out and earned a couple quick black flags including one for contact. Our penalty was that I had to reweld a trophy that had broken. Once we did that our driver went out to finish his stint and I hunted down the car he hit to make sure everything and everyone was okay. It ended up being a minor hit which caused them to spin out. They were cool about it and I sat back to enjoy the rest of the race.

Carl had three black flags that weekend. He was done driving for the weekend so I figured it would quiet down. Then Matt came in for going four off and the judges weren't happy. They parked us for thirty minutes and made us dress up like the Village People and pick up the garbage laying around the paddock. Once our penalty was served we got back on track and finished the race with no further incidents. Even with our late start and off track incidents we managed to turn 177 laps and finished 55th out of 76.

Once the race was over we took the Jetta to Fear City, the haunted house that Carl works at. They are in a couple of parades on the 4th of July and wanted to use the car for the parades so we left them the car so they could decorate it. On the 4th I showed up and saw the car for the first time since they decorated it. She looked great. I took the car to get gas since it was on empty and I got more than a few weird looks. Once she was gassed up I went and got my zombie makeup and hopped in the car for the drive to the parade. Maybe strapping toy dolls to your wheels isn't a good idea because the Jetta had a nasty vibration that got a little better when one of the dolls went flying off on the way there. I watched a car behind me swerve out of the way to avoid getting hit. Good stuff.

At the first parade one of the organizers was a little nervous because they put the Secretary of State right behind us. I told him not to worry, the car is licensed and insured and he breathed a little easier.

The crowds were great and they loved the car. Then we headed over to the other parade. One of the organizers for that one actually wanted to see proof of insurance before they would let us into the staging area. After another fun parade we left the car at Fear City. We came back a week later and took all the decorations off and took our baby down to the garage to get ready for the next race, Road America. We had about four months to get it ready. Plenty of time, right?

At NMF Racing headquarters (otherwise known as my Mother-In-Law's garage) we have a couple of dry erase boards and the first thing we did was write up a list of the things we wanted to get done before the race. One of the main things I wanted to do was add gussets to the roll cage. I never got them done before our first race and with us going to a track like Road America with it's long straights I wanted to reinforce the cage. I also wanted to change the transmission. One of the reasons we got our car so cheap was that it had no reverse gear. We planned on driving this car on the street so reverse would come in handy some day so that was at the top of the list. We would get together on Tuesdays after work to hang out, work on the car and drink beer. One day a week should be plenty when you have four months until your next race, right?

Before we knew it we were running out of time. Two weeks before the race and the engine and transmission still weren't in the car. The weekend before the race it was crunch time. I couldn't make it down on Saturday but Matt and Eric worked until 5:00 AM and then went home to catch a little sleep. I picked Eric up three hours later and we worked all day Sunday. Tuesday we worked until 2 AM and finally got the engine and new trans in. We fired the

car up for this first time that night. Finally it looked like we might be going racing.

Wednesday night we buttoned everything up and packed up everything we wanted to take to the track. We still hadn't driven the car but it had been raining most of the week and I didn't want to pull the car out and try to drive it in the rain just in case something went wrong. After work Thursday I went to pick up the trailer and it was pouring buckets. Eventually it stopped raining and I pulled the car out of the garage and onto the trailer. It was the first time the car moved under it's own power in four months.

For this race we had a couple new guys join the team. Doug Ryan was going to be driving with us and Jim Shearer was going to be doing pit crew duties. The two of them helped me load the car and all our tools into our vehicles. We were ready to hit the road.

Friday morning I got a late start but I was still the first to get to Road America. When I got there I parked in the paddock and walked around to meet some of my fellow Lemonites. As my teammates started showing up we started to unload and set up our paddock space. Before we even got the car off the trailer Brent and Adam from White Trash had the hood up and were looking for a vacuum leak I thought we might have since the car wouldn't idle. We thought we had it fixed so we drove it off the trailer and got ready to take it out for practice.

Aaron from White Trash was driving with us for this race and with his experience level I felt comfortable asking him to take the car out for it's shakedown run. The car had been driven a total of about 50 feet until that point. Aaron took off and we waited to see him go by on the front straight. And we waited. And waited. Eventually he came in on the hook. The car just died going into Canada Corner. We opened the hood and dug around a bit until someone noticed the coil wire was broken off. We ran to get a new one and by the time we got back and put it on we decided it was too late to run anymore practice since we still hadn't tech'ed the car.

We pulled into tech at 4:58. We were the last ones tech'ed and we passed with flying colors. We were ready to race. We closed up our paddock spot and headed to town to get something to eat.

Our first stop was Seibken's. Judge Phil said all the teams were supposed to show up in costume so we went there and no one was there, just five locals sitting around drinking. As we walked in one of them went "Oh great, more racers". Talk about feeling unwelcome! We had a quick drink and got the hell out of there. We ended up having dinner at a sports bar in Plymouth. We had several drinks with dinner and told many stories as well as giving driving pointers to the less experienced drivers. Afterwards we went back to the lake-house we rented for the weekend to get some sleep and get ready to go racing.

A quick note about our lake-house. Jim asked for recommendations for a hotel on the LeMons forum. Someone mentioned that they were renting a house so he looked into it and found a really nice house right by the track. According to the online ad it slept ten people and we had nine so we thought it would be great. Once we were getting ready for bed we realized there was one king size bed, two twins, a day bed and two sofas. How the hell does that sleep ten people? I forgot to bring a pillow or a blanket so I ended up just laying on the floor and throwing a hoodie over myself to try to keep warm.

Race day dawns sunny and cold. We get Aaron in the car and he gets in line to get on track. Once he gets out there Adam turns to me and gives me a fist bump and congratulates me on having the car ready and on track for the green flag. Only Aaron came back in before the green flag flies. He says the new clutch is slipping. We try to adjust it but there isn't much we can do other than send him out and hope for the best. By the time we get him back on the track the race had already started. Aaron completes his one hour stint and brings the car in for my turn. I head out and spend the next hour and a half having the time of my life. The car is running great and handling pretty decent. The brakes and tires are awesome. Coming down the hill into turn 5 if you wait until the last second and stomp on the brakes it makes your ears pop. It was amazing! I admit I had a couple of minor brain fades but no off track excursion and after my stint I pulled into the paddock so we could check the oil and torque the lugs nuts. We put Doug in the car and he went out and ran a clean hour plus. Things were looking good. After Doug finished his stint he pulled in and it was Matt's turn.

Moments before the wreck as viewed from the Skid Marks Racing Neon. *Courtesy of Ryan Roberson*

During Matt's stint he ended up losing it in turn 8 and ended up earning our first black flag. After a quick trip to the penalty box and a stern warning from Judge Eric, Matt was back on track and finished his stint without further incident. Now it was time to put Carl in the car. He was our last driver of the day. So far our race was going pretty good. We were 32nd out of 76 teams. Matt pulled into the hot pit and we fueled the car and put Carl in. We were supposed to check the oil and retorque the lug nuts every other pit stop so we told Carl to run one lap and bring the car to our paddock space so we could do the service. I went back to the paddock and grabbed the torque wrench and waited for him to come in.

We were waiting for Carl to come around and he wasn't coming. We started to think that the car might have broken down when we realized the track had gone full course yellow. Road America only goes full course yellow when there is an accident. After the entire field had gone by twice we knew Carl was involved but had no idea how bad it was. Eventually Jim saw the car coming in on the flatbed and it was bad. Carl had lost control in turn 8 and went straight into the concrete wall. Our car was totaled and we couldn't find our driver. The tow truck driver said they took him to medical but when I went there it was empty. It took fifteen minutes to find him and find out his condition. He was beaten up pretty good but nothing was broken. The safety equipment did it's job. That night we downloaded the footage from the onboard cameras and studied what happened. It was just driver's error. Sunday we had one of the wreckers from the track load the car onto the trailer for us. The rest of the team slowly made their way home while I stayed around to the end of the race.

The next few days we spent taking a few things out of the car and eventually I took it to the scrap-yard. NMF Racing's future is up in the air right now. Matt and Eric have decided that they want to build a car and I've joined White Trash Racing so it looks like we're closing the book, but who knows what the future brings. By the way, the NMF in NMF Racing never stood for any one thing. It had many meanings. The best was *Not My Fault*. Now it's more like *No More Future*.

The aftermath of turn 8.