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This '32 roadster took 32 years

Story and photos by Randall Bohl

The "32" on the license plate doesn't stand for '32 Ford Roadster, although that's what it is, and it would make sense at first glance. Instead, it actually refers to the 32 years this car was "in the build."

The story begins with the purchase of a Westcott fiberglass body, in 1976, although the hood, sides, grille shell and running boards are steel. The frame came from Jerry Kugel Komponents in 1978, and Marlis Williams began construction of this beautiful Ford in his Chelsea, Michigan race car shop, building around an engine formerly run by Williams and Dave Bohl in their early 1970s Alcohol Funny Cars—a power plant with a history, as well.

In the early 1980s, a career change for Williams,

from Chrysler engineering to Subaru, moved the project to Corona, California, then ultimately—20 years later—to Phoenix, where Marlis operates M&K Restorations. Working in between and all around all that "making a living," the '32 Ford Roadster was finally completed in time for the 2010 Father's Day LA Roadster Show.

This is no kit car. The radiator has been moved 4 inches forward to accommodate a blower drive. The hood and side panels were lengthened the same amount. The grille insert is a stainless by Dan Fink. Both the front and rear bumpers have been moved closer to the body by modifying the bumper brackets. The rear fenders were widened about 2.5 inches, which required

special running boards, to flow in correctly. These hood and fender modifications are not noticeable at first or even second glance.

Kugel originally set up the frame to accept early Jaguar suspension, though the torsion bars were removed to give clearance for the headers. Coil-over shocks were adapted to the front control arms. The rear suspension was modified with a faux-quick-change rear, with a 9-inch Ford aluminum center section and inboard brakes. Special axle shafts were fabricated with only the outer Jaguar bearing hubs used. Special knock-offs and pin drives were fabricated to use Mehelick true

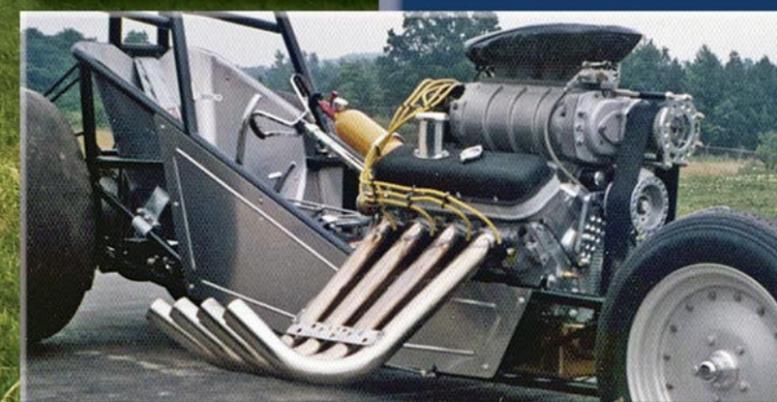
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It's 80 years since a '32 Ford was new, and 32 of those years were spent constructing this very special Roadster. At left, Marlis and Kuralay Williams show off the results at the Goodguys Southwest Nationals in 2011.

Author-photographer Randall Bohl says, "I find the motor of this car particularly special because I'm Dave Bohl's son. When this engine was built by Marlis and Dave for their funny cars, I was in late elementary school and, at such an age, was a designated cleaner of the wheels and scraper of the rubber from underneath the funny car body between race weekends, along with Marlis' son Ray Williams."

Photos below show this motor originally in the funny cars built and raced by Marlis Williams and Dave Bohl. The blower has since been polished for the '32 Roadster.





knock-off wheels (6x14 front and 8x15 rear).

The block is an all-aluminum 390-cu.in. Reynolds Can-Am. Can-Am motors were originally 430 cu.in. with a large bore and short stroke (4.44" bore x 3.47" stroke). These Chevrolet-designed blocks were originally available to only three racing teams: McLaren, UOP Shadow and Chaparral.

The block for this car was first obtained from the Shadow Racing team of Chicago in the early 1970s, by Marlis and Dave for a BB/FC "alky funny car." The block had been damaged by a broken rod and could not be reused by the Can-Am team, because the bores were aluminum and no "tin-plated pistons" were available for an over-bore.



Marlis and Dave decided to make the engine a "truck block" configuration (.400" taller deck height) and install steel liners in the block to correct the damaged cylinder wall. Neither Williams nor Bohl seems to recall who "decked the block," but they do recall the trick to pressing steel sleeves into an aluminum block. They built a great big version of an Easy-Bake Oven, full of hot lights to heat the block, and they put the steel sleeves in the deep freezer. The plan was to expand the block, shrink the sleeves and work really fast.

On this bottom end was placed a "Pete Robinson/George Montgomery" 6/71 all-magnesium "pruned case," made in the early 1960s for weight reduction. This was modified by Dave and used on their funny cars until larger blowers became the norm. (The blower shop was Bohl's family basement.) The blower has been polished since its days on the funny cars, for its use in the '32 Roadster.

Final displacement of the motor is approximately 500 cubic inches. And the combination proved very successful, as it was the first "Chevy"-powered Alcohol Funny Car to exceed 200 mph in the quarter mile. When the motor was retired from that funny car, in about 1974, it was deemed a candidate for a future street rod planned by Marlis.

In its present configuration in the Roadster, it has the original short crankshaft/long rods and is just over 404 cubic inches, with open chamber/D port aluminum heads—similar to early L88 racing heads—and a Mallory Super Mag II distributor. The modified Crane roller tappet camshaft is from the original funny car engine (detuned for street use with a blower).

The fuel injection manifold is a special fabrication made by Marlis to adapt 54mm Weber throttle bodies and reduce the overall engine height below hood level. A FAST™ computer system manages the fuel, set up by Bob Ream of Imagine Injection. The exhaust system is all stainless steel—headers, four mufflers, four tailpipes and hangers. Tubes are all mandrel bent, with no welds except at the header plates, and were fabricated by Marlis.

Chassis dyno numbers are just north of 725 hp.

Paint was done in-house by Steve Wallace. Colors are PPG 2-stage silver/blue similar to the 2004 Chrysler PT Dream Cruiser Series 3, with pinstriping by Dennis Rickless. The interior is by Chuck Booth of Phoenix: blue leather over Nissan 300Z seats, with Mercedes-Benz cross weave carpet, and a removable Mercedes Hartz cloth top.

Many other items were also designed and fabricated by Williams over the 32 years of construction, including Viz engine mounts, multiple brackets, throttle linkage, knock-off wheel hubs, heat shields, front valence, remote rumble seat actuation, a full roll cage, side entry bars, stainless lines, wiring systems, steering linkage, and hood side panel blisters. Marlis handled complete design, fabrication and assembly of the overall project (other than specialists mentioned above).

Marlis showed his car at the Goodguys Rod & Custom Association 14th Southwest Nationals in Scottsdale in November 2011 and will be there again this month. At that LA Roadster Show in 2010, frame-builder Jerry Kugel himself was the first to say, "Well, Marlis, the 32-year wait was worth it." ■

