

CIRCLE TRACK

Classic

1936

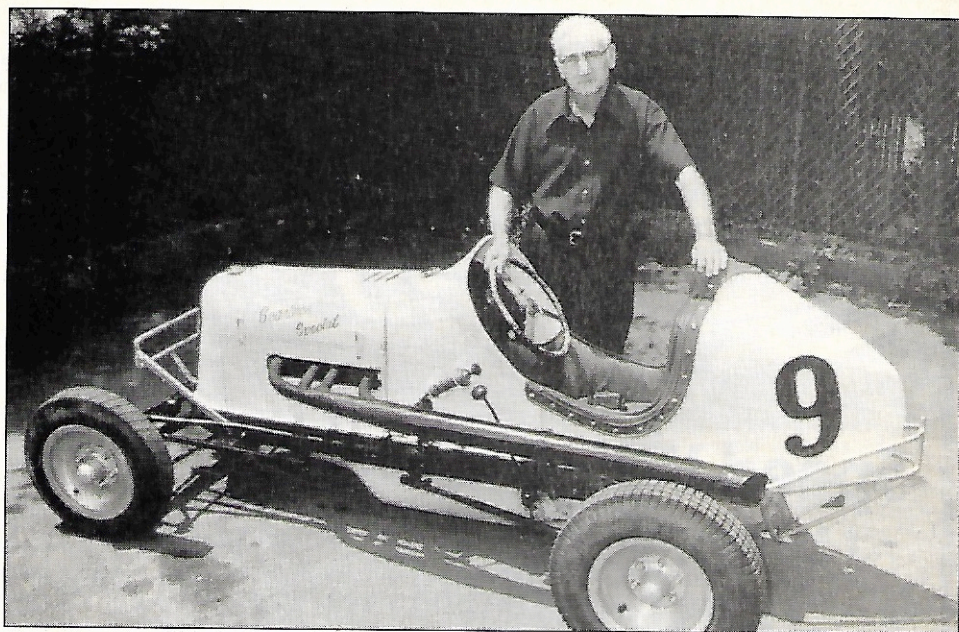
COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY:
THOMAS GLATICH



Bill Scarince and the Scarince Special pictured on the cover of the Roosevelt Raceway program circa 1938. Roosevelt Raceway was a 1/2-mile oval located in Westbury, New York. Where else could you get



Midget racing and bingo on the same program in the Thirties? (Scarince Family Collection photo)



A recent photo of Bill Scarince with his Scarince Special. (Scarince Family Collection photo)

By **THOMAS GLATCH**

Homemade Midget

BEFORE WORLD WAR II it took more than just a lead foot and a fat wallet to race on dirt tracks. Back then, a man built his machinery with his own hands and used a blend of junkyard parts and whatever little speed equipment was available. Often enough, the outstanding result was a unique race car filled with personal touches and interesting innovations. This month's CIRCLE TRACK Classic, the Scarince Special Midget, is a great example.

While growing up in New Jersey at the height of the Depression, Bill Scarince began racing Sprint cars. Scarince, now 80, recently recalled, "I started racing on my college money. If I spent \$25 a week, I figured I could earn it back racing. It didn't work that way, but I did get a good education—good enough to learn how to weld, cut, and machine, and good enough to get me a job in defense work during the war. Anyway, I started racing Sprints in 1931 in a Rajo Model T. I was going to rebuild it after 1932, but then I got the chance to drive the Green Engineering car. And when the Midgets came in around 1936, I raced both Sprints and Midgets. That kept me pretty busy!"

In 1936, Scarince built his first Midget for a doctor he had driven for in the past. Then he created a similar car, the car pictured on these pages, for himself. It's very straightforward. He fabricated the rail frame out of 10-gauge steel, and formed the body out of aluminum sheet. He also crafted his own tubular front axle and fitted it with Model T Ford spindles. The steering gear came from a Franklin car. The rearend was a Model A Ford center section, and for less unsprung weight he used axles pirated from an

American Austin. Because only one final drive ratio was available with the Ford rearend, a small gearbox was installed behind the engine, which was a Van Blerck four-cylinder, all-aluminum, single overhead cam powerplant with dry-sump lubrication, originally built for racing boats. Excepting its three main bearing crankshaft, it was quite an advanced design in its time. "I fell in love with it when I first saw it," Scarince explains. "I especially liked the single overhead cam part of it. The American Racing Drivers Club (ARDC) didn't allow double overhead cam engines, meaning I couldn't buy an Offenhauser, so I kept working on the Van Blerck, trying to make something out of it." Adapting the engine for use in a Midget meant scrapping the starter and flywheel, modifying the exhaust ports and manifold, and punching the 91-cubic-inch block out to 118 cubic inches.

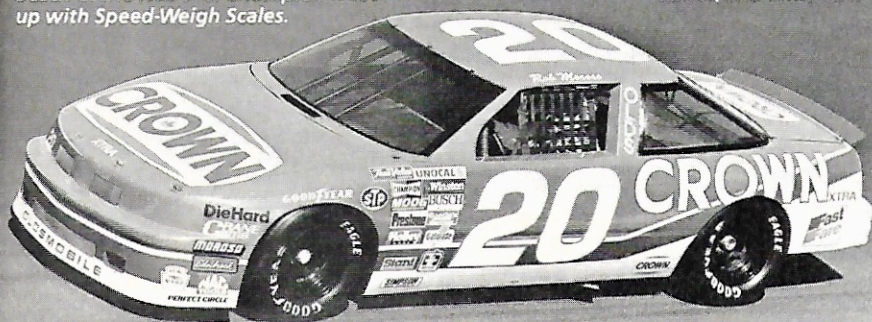
Making the engine live in a Midget was another matter. "I got this engine in a hurry," Scarince continues, "and it wasn't long before the crankshaft broke. So I just made a five main bearing crankshaft out of a solid piece of steel. I bolted in the no. 2 and no. 4 mains, but didn't have the time to make a new block, and the extra weight slowed the engine down so much I put a new gearbox in so I could wind up the revs tighter. But in order to keep up with the fast competition I had to raise the compression. That brought up the speed, but then I had timing chain trouble. After I fixed that, the oil pump couldn't keep up. And after getting that right, the water pump was turning too fast. In other words, every time I changed one thing, I had to change *everything*."

Scarince enjoyed consistent top-five finishes at ARDC and American Automobile Association tracks up and down the East Coast: West Haven, Bridgeport, Roosevelt Raceway, and many others. Some of the names he raced against include Ernie Gesell, Doc Shanebrook, Bob Sall, and the dominant "Four Bills": Messieurs

HOMEMADE MIDGET

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Schindler, Morrissey, Troutwein, and Holmes. Scarince additionally had the distinction of racing the first Midget on New Jersey's Nutley Velodrome, the infamous 45-degree-banked, wood-surfaced oval originally built for bicycles.

"The promoter, Jack Kochman, wanted to put on a race and he wanted to see what two cars looked like on the track," Scarince recalls. "Red Redmond and I put on an exhibition for him, and Redmond was driving the other Van Blerck I built for the doctor. It was December, the boards were gray, the sky was gray, and we didn't know where we were, but we still lapped in under nine seconds—way too fast! I never raced there again. Unfortunately, we later lost a couple of drivers there, and that closed the track down."

Losing drivers was a common enough occurrence. "I was in the hospital quite a few times," Scarince says. "Driver protection in the car consisted of a St. Christopher medal mounted on the dash. Sometimes I wore a seat belt, and sometimes I didn't. One time I went out to time trials, and when I got in the third turn I didn't back off soon enough and I went over the fence upside down. I got thrown out, which was fortunate because the cockpit landed on a stump. But a month later, after I'd recuperated, I was racing at West Haven and went right into a fence post. This time, luckily, I had my belt on. Otherwise, I would have been catapulted into a big fence. So, you never know."

Scarince retired as a driver in 1938, but a number of other drivers then piloted the Scarince Special, most notably a college student named Bayard Tewkesbury, who competed under the pseudonym of Dave Randolph.

Following the war, Scarince tried campaigning his Midget again, but racing had changed. The mass-produced, tube-frame racers of Frank Kurtis were virtually unbeatable, especially when powered by the exotic Offenhauser. The age of the homemade Midget was over, and the Scarince Special was considered so outdated that there were no takers when it was put up for sale. For decades it languished around the Scarince home, serving time as a children's toy until it was brought back to life just a few years ago by Bill and his son, Bill Jr. Today it's in remarkably authentic, unaltered, handcrafted condition.



CIRCLE TRACK FACTS

What was the first year the World of Outlaws made the swing to the West Coast at the start of the season rather than later in the fall? Answer: 1986