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Packed with up to 132 gallons of whiskey, the 1940 Ford coupe was the "runner's" vehicle of choice into the 1950s.

From *Moonshine—Blue Ridge Style*, an exhibition at the Blue Ridge Institute & Museum of Ferrum College www.blueridgeinstitute.org

The February 2009 *Hot Rod* magazine article *Moonshine Runners, History, and Their Cars* states: "The old '40 Fords, with their flathead V-8 engines, dominated the moonshine scene until the '50s. The most frequent modification [other than beefing up suspension by adding a few leaves to the traverse springs to ride level while carrying a heavy load] was to replace the flathead V-8 with the biggest Cadillac engine they could find, which happened to be in the carmaker's ambulances ... bore and stroke it to get all possible cubic inches, and slap a supercharger on it."

Roddy Moore, Director of the Blue Ridge Institute & Museum of Ferrum College, is a specialist in Virginia folklore, early stock car racing, and the history of "white liquor." (White liquor is moonshine; brown liquor is store-bought whiskey.) He's also a hot rodder who currently owns a '32 3W coupe, a '32 roadster, a '49 coupe, and is building a special 3W '40 Ford Coupe. He said:

After the war, the '39s and '40s were popular among the early racers: They had that 85 horsepower flathead V-8 and the hydraulic brakes. The newer '41s and '42s were awkward, top-heavy cars, so the '40 coupe was the hot setup.

We've got a picture here in the Blue Ridge Institute & Museum archives of NASCAR Hall of Fame nominee Curtis "Pops" Turner at Marion [in Smith County], taken in 1947, at the first dedicated car dirt track in Virginia. [Racers had used fairground horse tracks for years.] In the photo, Turner is in his race car, a '40 coupe, which he drove back and forth from home in Roanoke.

But while Curtis Turner was a moonshine "tripper," in truth few Blue Ridge moonshine drivers dabbled in organized racing. The real ties between white liquor and racing took place in local garages where mechanics modified engines for speed, and suspensions for handling. They would beef up the traverse springs, add sway bars and sometimes double shocks. They'd run Offy heads with either two or three-carb intakes, a modified ignition system, and maybe an Isky 404 cam. These mechanics became local heroes and the best ones later served on NASCAR teams.

NASCAR was founded in 1947-48 by Bill France, Sr., of Daytona Beach.

Amazon.com says this about Daniel Pierce's new book, *Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay and Big Bill France*.

... Daniel Pierce offers a revealing new look at the sport from its postwar beginnings on Daytona Beach and Piedmont dirt tracks through the early 1970s when the sport spread beyond its southern roots and gained national recognition ... Pierce not only confirms the popular notion of NASCAR's origins in bootlegging, but also establishes beyond a doubt the close ties between organized racing and the illegal liquor industry ... Drawing on the memories of a variety of participants — including highly colorful characters like Lloyd Seay, Roy Hall, Gober Sosebee, Smokey Ynick, Bunky Knudsen, Humpy Wheeler, Bobby Isaac, Junior Johnson, and Big Bill France himself — *Real NASCAR* shows how the reputation for wildness of these racers-by-day and bootleggers-by-night drew throngs of spectators to the tracks in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. They came to watch their heroes maneuver ordinary automobiles at incredible speed, beating and banging on each other, wrecking spectacularly, and fighting out their differences in the infield.

Junior Johnson is one of this year's five charter inductees

Into the new NASCAR Hall of Fame in Charlotte, North Carolina, along with Bill France, Sr., Bill France, Jr., Dale Earnhardt, and Richard Petty. Johnson's fame as a good ol' boy stock car racer started up in the 1950s, and then author Tom Wolfe (*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, *The Right Stuff*) made him a mainstream celebrity in his March 1965 *Esquire* magazine article, *The Last American Hero is Junior Johnson. Yes!*

Before his illustrious racing career, though, Johnson hauled moonshine for his family's business out of Wilkes County, North Carolina. It was while driving dead-of-night, moonlit back roads at high speed, evading alcohol tax agents, that he was credited (among others, like Curtis Turner) with the "bootleg turn." That's when a driver suddenly puts a car into a 180-degree turn and speeds back in the direction he has come from. Of course that's not a move used much in oval track racing, but it was Johnson who discovered a revolutionary technique while practicing for the 1960 Daytona 500. It's called drafting, where a close-following car can gain speed by falling into the slipstream of the car in front of it. It's now a tactic seen in every NASCAR race.

That race — the 1960 Daytona 500 — was the biggest race of his career and he won it with bold, hard driving along with the creative mastery of airstream physics.

But before doing any organized racing, Johnson was running moonshine. It's how he honed his driving skills. He told *Hot Rod* magazine in its February 2009 issue, "On the race track, you're a-runnin' to beat someone. On the highway, you're a-runnin' for your life."

Early on, moonrunner cars did double duty as dirt track racers. It was a '40 Ford Standard, Johnson's brother LP's moonshine car, that he raced at the North Wilkesboro Speedway way back in 1949.



The distinctive chevron taillight. The '40 Standard came with just one on the left side. It functioned only as a brake and running light, not as a turn signal.

MOON RUNNER

How the 1940 Ford Coupe Became Classic

Story and car photos by Randy Johnson

Pierce recounts the story of how bootleggers started stock car racing. He quotes Tim Flock's personal account in Sylvia Wilkinson's book *Dirt Tracks to Glory*:

I know exactly how racing got started ... In the mid-thirties, in a cow pasture in Georgia [near Stockbridge, 15 miles out of Atlanta] ... We didn't have no tickets, no safety equipment, no fences, no nothing. Just a bunch of bootleggers who'd been arguing all week about who had the fastest car would get together to prove it.

Pierce said, "Indeed, there is no disputing the fact that significant numbers of the early drivers in stock car racing — especially the most successful ones — had their initial high-speed driving experiences evading the law at the wheel of a souped-up 1939 or '40 Ford V-8 loaded with 120 gallons of illegal whiskey ... the very foundations of the sport were built on the proceeds of the manufacture, transport and sale of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of cases of white liquor ... in the Piedmont region of the South and its adjacent foothills."



Street Rodder said the '40 Deluxe headlight is the "nicest of the prewar period."

Yes, the 1940 Ford Coupe is legendary in its association with moonshine and early racing, but how did it attain its classic, appealing looks?

In 1931, Eugene "Bob" T. Gregorie was hired at age 22 by Edsel B. Ford. In 1935, Edsel made him the first design chief of the Ford Motor Company. Along with designing the 1935-42 Fords, he was responsible for designing the 1936 Lincoln Zephyr (described as the "first successfully streamlined car in America" by the Museum of Modern Art in New York), the 1939 Lincoln Continental, and the 1949 Mercury, the car driven by James Dean in the classic 1955 movie *Rebel Without a Cause*. (More about another famous car that was in the movie, the '49 Ford Convertible, in a future catalog: It's in Bob Drake's garage.)

Bob Gregorie had a unique background and talent for automotive design. He had previously worked in ship and yacht design (which explains the prow-like hood design of the 1939-40 Fords), and he had the unique talent of being able to translate Edsel Ford's ideas into three dimensions.

It was Gregorie who in 1937 first made the teardrop headlights integral to the curvature of the front fenders (faired-in), making for a smooth fender line. Each following year, he moved the headlights farther out toward being in line with the wheels, and according to *Street Rodder* magazine, the 1940 headlights are the nicest of the prewar period. *Street Rodder* said, "Gregorie found a beautiful way to shell them with a nacelle that incorporated parking lights on top." And for the first time, all Fords were fitted with sealed beam headlights.

The '40 Standards continued with a vertically-barred grille that closely

resembled that of the '39 Deluxe, while the '40 Deluxe sported a distinctive grille with a chrome horizontal-barred centerpiece, and smaller body-colored horizontal grilles on each side.

Overall, some argue that the beautifully-smooth lines of the '40 make it one of Gregorie's finest design achievements: right up there with the Lincoln Continental and the '49 Merc.

The exterior of the '40 coupe is exquisite, but the innovations didn't stop with its outside appearance. Bob "Lil Axle" Stewart, whose life story was highlighted in Bob Drake's *Catalog 24A*, said, "When I was nine or 10, a guy brought his '40 up to Suncrest [San Diego County, California] and the thing that struck me was that beautiful dash. It had style, with the clustered instrument panel pointing out, that pretty radio grille, and the shifter was on the column ... 1940 was the first year of the column shift for Fords and when I got older we found out the car was great for dating ... it was far better than getting a floor shift stuck up your butt." (Could the column shifter be the REAL reason for the popularity of the '40 coupes?!)

Stewart continued, "The '40 coupes were even more popular after the war, since the production of cars for civilians stopped during the '42 production run [only 160,211 were produced], and there were no consumer cars made again until 1946. The returning G.I.s had money, and demand outstripped the supply of the new model cars. 1940 cars were available, and to the guys returning from the war, the '40 Coupe was like the 'Lincoln' of Fords."

"In the 1950s when my dad and I had the Speedshop [Stewart's Speed Automotive, San Diego, California] we put a '49 Olds 303 overhead engine in a '40 for a guy. That car would haul. Then we stuffed a '55 El Dorado engine with dual 4-barrels into another guy's '40. Whoah!" said Stewart.

Stewart had one last thing to add: "Yes, I think those moonshiners picked the '40 partly for the trunk. They could fit a lot of mason jars in back there. I'm a big guy, and that trunk's so deep I can completely lie down in the back of a '40."



"... the car most identified with the moonshine culture: the '40 Ford coupe." —Hot Rod Magazine