

“DRIVE IT LIKE YOU STOLE IT”

I knew I was in trouble when they asked me to post my blood type on the outside of the souped-up, stripped-down 1941 Ford I would copilot. For six days of heat and dust, 1,800 miles of twisting Mexican terrain and countless tequilas, I was about to join some very rich, very crazed gringos in the scariest, most pointless of all road races **BY GARY CARTWRIGHT**

THE WAITER BROUGHT ANOTHER ROUND OF TEQUILA for the drivers and a Cuba libre for the man known as the Chihuahua Express, who sucked it down the way a distance runner devours oxygen, draining it in a gulp and slamming the glass on the table with a cackle so maniacal the marimba player dropped his sticks. We were seated at a sidewalk café on the zocalo in Veracruz, Mexico, on the eve of the eleventh running of La Carrera Panamericana, the grueling six-day, 1,800-mile Mexican road race. The Chihuahua Express was expounding on the race's uniqueness, its challenge, its egalitarianism, its *Mexicanness*. As happens with all his narratives, this one traveled full circle until it returned to the only subject that really holds his full attention—himself. For a moment, he lost his train of thought. Then his eyes flickered under his moist glasses, his long face broke into a toothy Cheshire-cat grin, and he leaned dangerously back in his chair and began to paraphrase the reply Ambrose Bierce allegedly offered

Pancho Villa when Pancho asked the old gringo why he had joined the Mexican Revolution.

“If you hear of me stuffing my Hudson Hornet into some Mexican stone wall or high-siding a cliff south of Tehuacán,” the Chihuahua Express extolled in his whiskey-soaked Wolfman Jack baritone, “please know it is a better way to depart this life than falling down the cellar stairs. To be a gringo in Mexico—ah, that is euthanasia!”

The name Chihuahua Express would not appear on his driver's license, though I doubt he even has one. Officially, he is Loyal George Truesdale III, American coordinator of La Carrera. The original La Carrera ran from 1950 until it was suspended in 1954, and Truesdale helped revive it in 1988. His *nombre del camino* derives from the name on the Hudson Hornet he drove that year. Though he was born in Roseburg, Oregon, and has lived in Los Angeles for more than thirty years, Truesdale is as Mexican as diesel smoke and chili

Illustration by Olaf Hajek

