

# Saving the Triple Zero

By Ken Paulsen

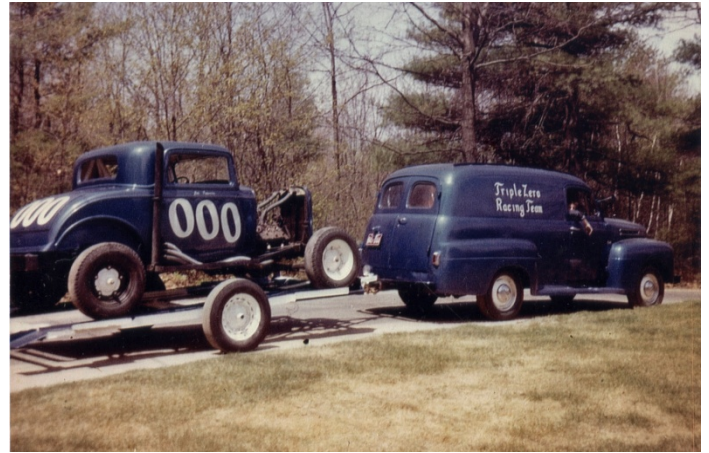
Harvey Price didn't want it. Dave Simard didn't want it. Fred Farrah didn't want it. Robbie LaCroix didn't want it. And Howard Towne didn't want it – twice! It was a long forgotten piece of local racing history shuffled from one owner to another, scavenged for parts before its short life as a dominate stock car in the New England area was uncovered by Towne while looking at an old photograph.

The car was a 1932 Ford three window coupe built by the Harty boys, Marty and John, in the spring of 1959. The Harty's ran a scrap metal business in Barre, MA located on the family farm. They began putting a field of derelict early 1930s Fords to use by building stock cars to satisfy the racing craze of the late 1940s. They could usually satisfy a purchase request in a week, but on one occasion had a 1935 Ford ready in one long day. Marty guaranteed that the car would win by placing his driver in the seat who would then proceed to win at tracks in either Brookline, NH or Westboro, MA.

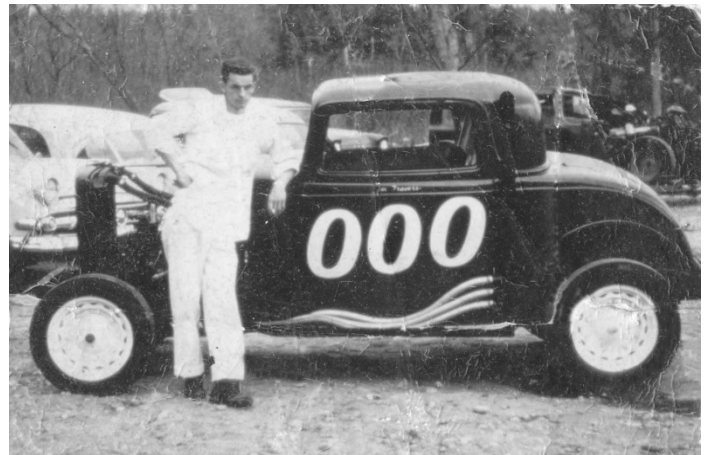
They quit building for a period of time in the 1950s before once again taking on projects in the late 1950s. One of the hallmarks of the Harty cars was its excellent handling capabilities on quarter mile asphalt ovals. Marty read incessantly anything written about setup and incorporated his knowledge into each car built. It was this Harty reputation that probably prompted Jim Travers to select a 1932 Ford three window coupe out of the field and commission the Hartys to prepare a stock car for the 1959 season. The \$700 deal came with the specification that it would be painted 1956 Dodge Royal Blue metallic, a very popular color with hot rodders in that era. Al Lyman lettered the car and painted the number Travers wanted – "000".

With Travers behind the wheel, the car was an instant winner even though he was in his first year of racing. By the end of the season he had accumulated enough points to be declared the champion at Brookline Speedway. He did get a boost in that effort from another good driver, Freddie Borden. Travers and John Harty took time out to attend the Indy 500 that year. Marty Harty asked Borden

to drive the Triple Zero in Brookline's Memorial Day races. He brought the car home first in the feature and those points were enough to allow the Travers to finish ahead of Roger Lancey at season's end.



**A rare color photo shows the 1949 Ford panel truck used to haul Triple Zero. (Jim Travers collection)**



**Jim Travers poses next to the car that took him to the 1959 Brookline championship. (Harty collection)**

Travers only raced that one year before the car was sold. Rumor has it that the good looking driver was getting too many unsolicited post race offers from his female fan base. His wife got wind of it and put an end to the temptation by selling the car.

The next owner brush painted the car red and white and changed some of the Harty setup. It was never as competitive again. It is unknown how long it was raced. The best guess is a couple of years before it was relegated to a life of shuffling from one scrap heap to another.

It was in the early 1990s when Howard Towne of rural Dorchester, NH first picked up the remnants of what ultimately proved to be the Triple Zero. Towne had become a well known restorer of vintage Fords. After studying industrial arts in college, he taught shop classes in the Belmont, NH school system before “all the politics” finally got to him. In 1977 he went from a part time restorer to a full time occupation dealing primarily in Ford Model As and early V8s. Over the next several years he began acquiring any parts that could help in future projects. As a result he amassed a collection of vintage tin including two rare 1932 Ford three window coupe bodies.

Towne had heard about a derelict stock car that Dave Simard of Leominster, MA wanted to unload. It had a deck lid stuck on that was not the original, a single hoop roll cage, frame and a driver’s seat that probably came out of a metro van type truck. Since he had two other three window bodies, Towne decided to fork over the \$800 and add it to his growing collection of parts.



**Right side view shows the door skin missing and the limited roll cage protection. (Towne photo)**

About two years later, Simard contacted Towne and wanted the right rear quarter panel for a restoration he was doing. Towne sold him just the body for \$800 and retained the other stock car parts.

Eventually, all east coast restorers make the pilgrimage to Hershey, PA in the fall looking through the vast flea market area for those elusive parts. Howard Towne was no exception. He made the trek in 2000 and stopped at vendor Fred Farrah’s display where he noticed something quite familiar. It was the sheet metal he had resold to Simard. Farrah from Ayer, MA evidently came into possession of the pieces which he scavenged for a restoration. The price at Hershey was now \$2500 for what remained but included a frame, firewall and rear quarter. The “pile of junk” was a no sale.

Toward the end of the year, a flea market in Amherst, NH afforded one final chance to unload items before storing in some barn until spring. Another restorer, Robbie LaCroix from Enfield, NH, was strolling around the grounds when his wanderings brought him to the vendor space of one Fred Farrah. LaCroix called Towne and mentioned the ’32 Ford body. “Nothing I’d be interested in”, Towne told LaCroix so Robbie became the next owner.

The problem with long New Hampshire winters is that there is too much time to think while you’re waiting for spring. So in February 2001, Towne called LaCroix and mentioned that “maybe I should have that pile of junk”.



**The first time Howard Towne owned the Triple Zero was early in the 1990s. (Towne photo)**





**With the body on a rolling chassis, Towne gets a better idea of his future project. (Towne photo)**



**A photo taken of Freddie Borden winning the Memorial Day Race at Brookline Speedway shows the holes in the cowl that led to Towne concluding that he indeed was in possession of the Triple Zero. (Harty collection)**

With the passage of time and, once again, \$800, Towne took ownership of the parts.

The pieces lay dormant for the next three years. In 2004 a friend from Grafton, NH, Randy Haubrich, was talking with Towne and mentioned this old guy peddling parts who stopped by occasionally. "He use to build stock cars and showed me some pictures. You should take a look at them some time", Haubrich said. Towne did not have a

big interest in race cars but said he would next time he was in the area.

That time came a few weeks later. As Towne was looking at one of the cars Harty built, he noticed something very unusual. A 1932 Ford three windowed coupe numbered "000" had holes in the cowl exactly in the same position as the sheet metal pieces he had. It couldn't be the same car, ---- or could it? He asked Haulrich to get him in touch with Harty.

A meeting was arranged and in a short time period, Marty Harty (at that time approaching 90 years old) and Coastal181 proprietor, Lew Boyd, were at Towne's garage. It did not take long for Harty to glance at the parts and exclaim, "That's my car!" The cowl holes were probably a result of attaching a spot light or some other object by a previous owner before the car was scrapped. Holes in the left rear quarter were where Harty attached an exhaust stack, something he did on many of his cars. Harty said, "It probably didn't do anything to help performance, but it sounded nice." Harty even pointed out changes that were made after he built it. The final verification came when some of the faded, brushed on red paint was removed to reveal the 1956 Dodge Royal Blue metallic paint that Travers requested. This was the Triple Zero, or at least what was left of it.

Towne now had a quandary. "What do I do with it? Do I want to take this on as a project? It has a short history as a race car, but it was a winner and it can be documented." After some consideration, the decision was made. It gets restored, however putting food on the table would come first. The paying customers will have priority. Harty may have built it in a week, but for Towne, who is very meticulous and exacting in his restorations, this will be a several year effort.

The first endeavor was an attempt to fill in some missing history. He called Dave Simard to inquire where he got the car. "I bought it from Harvey Price over in Lunenburg (MA)", was the reply. Towne called Price who said he got the car sometime in the 1980s and, in fact, he thought he still had the driver door skin that had not been part of the remains passed around between former owners. A

search confirmed that Price still had it which he offered to give to Towne.

When Towne met with Price, to retrieve the door skin, Harvey mentioned that he found the car in a Lunenburg sandpit and parts that he did not want, including the last engine that was in the car, may still be there. Landowner permission was obtained and the pair was joined by a neighbor to search the area now reclaimed by nature. The engine was there. After it was back in his garage, Towne found cracks in the flathead block which eliminated it from being part of the restoration. However, exhaust flanges that were original with the Harty car could be used.



**Reconstructing the top from literally pieces was a painstaking operation. (Towne photo)**



**During its restoration, the Triple Zero was a visitor to the annual Vintage Celebration at New Hampshire Motor Speedway in Loudon, NH. (Paulsen photo)**

Another part of the history involved a little more luck. By chance, Towne got to meet Richard Wright who happened to be a half brother to Travers. He always looked up to his older brother and as a token was allowed to periodically give the wheels on the Triple Zero a fresh coat of paint. As the year 1959 rolled along, other pit members drifted away leaving just Wright to help out with the car.

Wright gave Towne the phone number for Travers who was now residing in Oceanside, California. A couple of long distance conversations filled in some missing information about that racing season. Travers even mailed two color photos of the car and panel truck used to tow it.

Travers did a little more driving after 1959 but soon joined the Marines to see the world. With all of the moves involved, trophies were thrown away except for one - the 1959 championship trophy from Brookline. Wright still has it "somewhere packed away in a box."

Getting the body in shape was priority number one. A portion of the roof pillars had been used by one owner when returning a chopped car back to original dimensions. Towne went to his scrap metal supply to piece that portion of the top together. The driver's door that he got from Price was welded back in place while the passenger door was allowed to open for easier entrance and exit. A large amount of time expended by Towne was used to get the body as close to original factory dimensions as possible. The Harty car was not chopped or channeled.

The engine became another matter. In addition to the flathead retrieved from the sandpit, two other candidates were also found to have crack blocks beyond repair. Finally one that came off of a pump in a building was in good enough condition to use.

The hardest part to find was a radiator that would fit within the 1932 shell. A 1938 rear end that was part of a trailer and an axle and wishbone out of his own supply went into the car.





The last engine to be in the original stock car is recovered from a former Lunenburg, MA sandpit in 2006. (Towne photo)

Parts that were original to the Harty car include the frame, cowl, most of the roof, left rear quarter, door shells, motor exhaust flanges, seat and a portion of the roll cage. A hood was added mainly to be in place when transporting and when precipitation was eminent.

The original tire specifications were included; 5.50x16(LF), 6.00x16(RF), 6.00x 16(LR) and 6.50x16(RR). A 3.78 ring and pinion which were used by Harty to run the quarter mile tracks, usually in second gear, also became part of the restoration.



(L to R) Marty Harty, John Harty and Roger Lancey enjoy a moment by the car at Marty's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in 2009 at the family farm in Barre, MA. (Towne photo)



Towne takes the Triple Zero on its first lap in over 55 years at the Northeastern Speedway site in Waterford, Vermont August 22, 2015. (Paulsen photo)



With Jim Travers helmet from the 1950s, restorer Howard Towne looks the part of a race car driver. (Paulsen photo)

Assisting Towne in the restoration was Geno Froulx who works with him on other restorations. Dick Mills of Lee, NH did the lettering.

The first outing for the Triple Zero as a running car was August 22, 2015 at the Northeastern Speedway annual reunion. The car still needed some minor touches such as brakes and a fuel tank but it did take one lap around the oval with a small gas can attached above the carburetor before getting loaded on the trailer.

The following week Towne brought the car to New Hampshire Motor Speedway to put it on display at the



annual Vintage Celebration. Marty Harty, now 96 years old came over from his Barrington, NH home to see the car under its own power once again. Towne now had the brakes and gas tank installed.



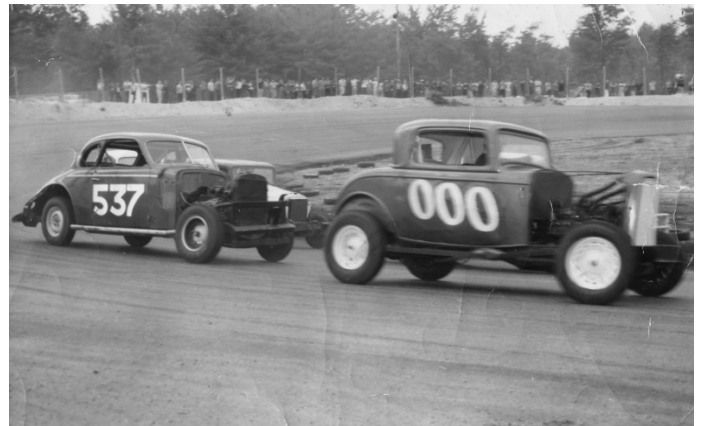
**Marty Harty (L) and Howard Towne discuss another Harty built car while the Triple Zero was on display at New Hampshire Motor Speedway August 27, 2015. (Paulsen photo)**

Some vintage cars put back on the track have made accommodations such as a modern fuel cell, racing seat, driver harness, and full roll cage to allow them to participate in on track racing exhibitions. The Triple Zero was restored to as original condition to the Harty car as Howard Towne could make it. The one exception is that the exhaust stacks will not be added back although the holes in the body where they were attached remain.

A part of New England racing history has been preserved for racing fans to enjoy. It will be used for display and, if run, only at pace car speeds when appearing at events in the Northeast.



Additional Photos:



**The Triple Zero at Brookline, NH in 1959. (Towne collection)**



**Pam Travers, Jim Travers and flagman Dave Faulkner are all smiles after a victory at Brookline. (Towne Collection)**



**NHMS, August 27, 2015. (Paulsen photo)**