

FANS SHOW ENTHUSIASM FOR THEIR FAVORITES IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS. T-SHIRTS AND BANNERS PROCLAIMING LOYALTY TO A GIVEN RACER OR TEAM MIGHT CONSTITUTE THE GROUND FLOOR OF FANSHIP. FACE OR BODY PAINT COULD BE CONSIDERED THE SECOND LEVEL. IN THE CASE OF MARSHALL MADRUGA AND HIS ENTHUSIASM FOR THE BIG OLY BRONCO AND DRIVER PARNELLI JONES, MARSHALL TOOK THE PROVERBIAL ELEVATOR ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE TOP FLOOR AND BLASTED THROUGH THE ROOF.

For those who may not remember or who've never gotten their hands on Marty Fiolka's book *1000 Miles to Glory: The History of the Baja 1000*, here's a little background info. Parnelli Jones piloted the "Big Oly" Bronco to back-to-back Baja 1000 wins in 1971 and 1972. "Big Oly" was no ordinary Bronco, and of course Jones was no ordinary driver. Jones, a premier Indy car driver at the time, was goaded into off-road racing by fabricator Bill Stroppe with some well-targeted taunts during a Christmas party. Not long after, Jones showed up on a starting line behind the wheel of a Stroppe-prepared Bronco. At the time, Stroppe's shop prepped Broncos by starting with a factory-fresh machine and adding key components and reinforcements—basically the modus operandi of building a stock-class racer today. Jones's driving prowess soon outpaced the durability of the Bronco, and parts began breaking, especially the Bronco's solid front axle.

Jones wasn't about to slow down to "save the truck." Instead, he decided that the Bronco should be purpose-built to handle the rigors of off-road racing. An interim solution came in the form of a Stroppe-prepped 2WD, Twin I-Beam version of the Bronco. This 2WD, stock-based Bronco worked well enough that Jones claimed top honors in the 1970 Baja 500. Jones knew he was onto something and decided to up the ante.

Parnelli approached Stroppe with the idea of building a tube-framed one-off chassis that would be cloaked by a Bronco-style fiberglass body. Bill Stroppe balked: This was too far a departure from what the Ford factory produced. Jones adopted a "Plan B" and worked with Stroppe employee Dick Russell after hours to make his vision a metallic reality. Eventually, Stroppe came around and joined in on the project. The result

BIG OLY RIDES AGAIN

THE ULTIMATE MODERN CLASSIC

BY KEVIN BLUMER
PHOTOGRAPHY: KEVIN BLUMER



was a chromoly tube-framed, TIG-welded, fiberglass-bodied, one-off machine built exclusively to go fast in the dirt. And it did. Driving the Olympia Beer-sponsored Bronco, Jones not only won the Baja 1000 in '71 and '72, he handily beat all the motorcycles while he was at it. That's fast!

Marshall Madruga wasn't at the Baja 1000 in Big Oly's heyday, but Big Oly's appeal proved timeless and spawned thousands of fans, Madruga among them. He built and drove a string of vintage Broncos during his

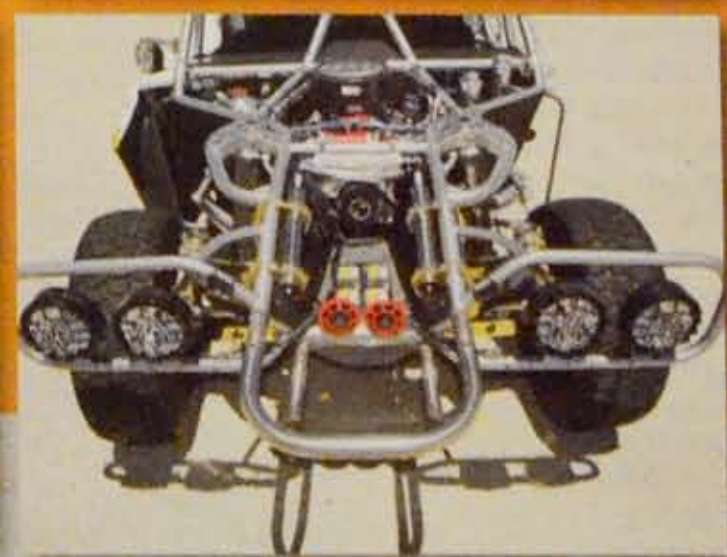
high school years, and eventually worked his way into a Class 8 Ford F-100 later in life. Just like Jones after winning the Baja 500, Madruga wanted to up the ante.

Putting the Class 8 F-100 up for sale, Madruga decided that the next step up would be a Trophy Truck. Now, Marshall isn't a poor man, but he's hardly one who can just march into a premier fab shop and sign a big, fat check. A major portion of this truck came from Madruga's personal skill and sweat equity.

The concept for the Big Oly Trophy Truck



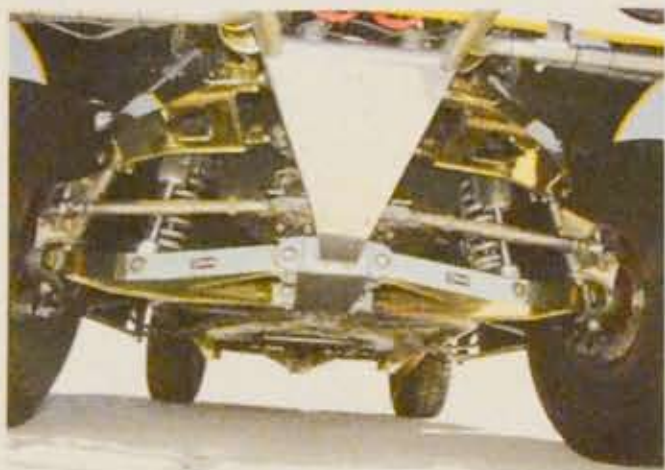
With the fiberglass attached, the aesthetic connection to the original Big Oly is unmistakable. Unskinned, it's apparent that this is a modern wolf in vintage clothing.



BIG OLY RIDES AGAIN



▲ The wing on top is the crowning aesthetic touch. Unlike most of the TT field, the Big Oly TT has almost no bare steel tubes. Everything's either powdercoated or plated.



▲ Sandco Performance A-arms pivot on Rod End Supply uniballs and rod ends through 24 inches of plush wheel travel. Controlling the suspension movement is a full complement of Bilstein hardware: a coilover, a Blackhawk bypass shock, and a bumpstop are on each corner of Big Oly. Directional control comes via a Howe steering rack with an integrated hydraulic assist.



▲ Like many Trophy Trucks, the Big Oly TT has its radiators and oil coolers behind the cab. Radiators and coolers are by C&R, and the plumbing comes from Fragola. Fire extinguishers and a rear-facing amber light are absolute musts.

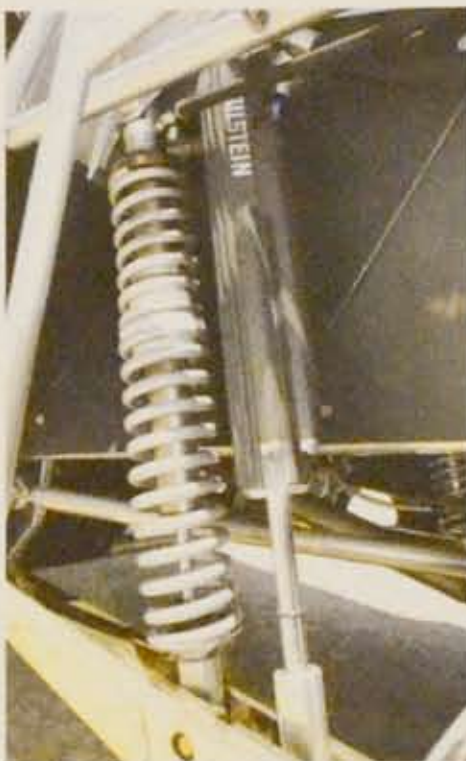
► Big Oly, all grown up. Parnelli Jones raced sprint cars on dirt ovals before he graduated to the Indy Car world. As such, he had a large palette of experience and skill to draw from as soon as he raced off-road. Seeing the cutting-edge equipment of yesteryear gives us even more respect for the toughness and driving skills of old-school champs like Parnelli.



came about as Madruga envisioned something that would wrap both his desire for all-out performance with his admiration for Big Oly and Parnelli Jones into one unique package. Using a Sandco Performance chassis as a template, Madruga completed the tube work without the aid of high-zoot fabrication tools or bucks-up computer modeling. "I actually did all of my tube notches using a hand-held Makita grinder," Marshall says proudly. The result is a machine with state-of-the-art performance that was built the old-school way.

Next it was time to build that which would set it apart from the rest of the TT field: the body. Obviously, no ready-made Bronco TT fiberglass existed, so Marshall used his years of surfboard shaping and building to his advantage. Just like with the

► Bilstein damping controls 31 inches of rear suspension travel. The lower links, along with the front A-arms and rear sway bar links, were brass-plated (yes, you read that right) and clearcoated. Yeah, they look awesome!



► The 9-inch-style rearend combines a Dirt Tech housing with a Currie/Gearworks third member. The third member holds a 10-inch, 5.14:1 ring-and-pinion set that's bolted to a full spool. Summers Bros. 300M axle-shafts take the power from the third member out to the Summers Bros. full-floating hubs that sit at each end of the Dirt Tech housing.

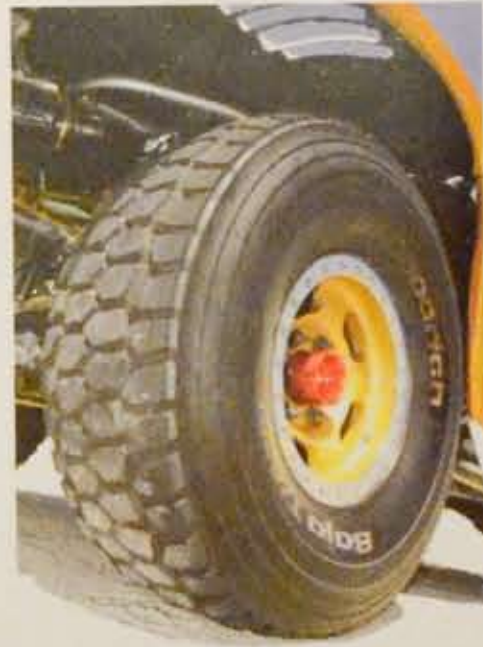


chassis, Madruga's sweat equity made the final product come to life. After Marshall shaped the body Perry's Fab N Fiber made the molds and final fiberglass. The body's crowning touch is naturally the huge polished wing on top just like the original.

Doing this story the right way involved not just one, but two photo shoots. The first was done in the dirt as usual. The second shoot was near Parnelli's shop in Torrance, California, with the Big Oly TT and the original Big Oly side by side. It was an awesome opportunity to meet a living legend.

With its up-to-the-minute suspension, highly-tuned drivetrain, and retro skin, the Big Oly TT is the ultimate modern classic. In this case, TT doesn't just stand for Trophy Truck. This is also a Tribute Truck. **OR**

► Vintage cloak, modern hardware carries through to the wheels. The classic "kidney bean" wheels were custom made by American Racing just for this truck, and they're wrapped with 39-inch BFG Baja T/A KRT tires. Summers Bros. hubs and Outlaw brakes round out the package.





▲ Driver and co-driver have plenty of legroom and sit securely in PRP seats with matching PRP harnesses. A MOMO steering wheel, Auto Meter gauges, and a Lowrance GPS unit are popular items because they're durable and race-proven.



▲ A lot of innovative thinking went into the original Big Oly. At the lower end of the front window opening, an intake channel scooped air and directed it upward through a dual-pane Plexiglas shorty windshield. This created an air curtain that kept a lot of dust out of the cab.



▲ Putting the air intake in the cab is a time-honored way to keep the filter from clogging when things get dusty. What looks like an E-brake lever is actually an adjuster for the trailing edge of the overhead wing. Adjusting the trailing edge up or down increased the aerodynamic downforce on the vehicle. Considering the Bronco's short wheelbase, vehicle control at high speeds was no laughing matter.



▲ The front suspension is a custom variation of Ford's Twin I-Beam. Instead of coming from the rear, the radius arms pivot from the front for better bump compliance. The steering linkage is also completely custom: the steering box is mounted aft of the coil spring and operates one end of a bellcrank, which in turn pivots the tie rods left and right.



▲ How cool is it to get your own name molded into your tires?



▲ The machines have changed, but the fun is the same.



▲ If you think you're famous or that you've done a lot, here's a reality check. This bank of filing cabinets holds Parnelli's collection of print media he's been featured in.

SPECS

VEHICLE: Big Oly TT
OWNER/HOMETOWN: Marshall Madruga/San Diego, CA
CHASSIS: Built by Marshall Madruga, based on a Sandco Performance design. 4130 Chromoly tubing, TIG welded
ENGINE: Ford 351 Windsor-based 438ci stroker built by Troy Bowen of Ford Performance
INDUCTION: Retrotek EFI
TRANSMISSION: Two-speed Powerglide by Mike's Transmissions, backed by a Gear Vendors overdrive unit
FRONT SUSPENSION: Sandco Performance A-Arms, Bilstein shocks, uniballs and rod ends by Rod End Supply
REAR SUSPENSION: Four-link based on a Dirt Tech housing, Dirt Tech lower trailing arms, Currie/Gearworks third member, Bilstein shocks. Housing and upper links are nickel-plated
RING AND PINION: 5.14:1, 10-inch ring gear
REAR DIFFERENTIAL: Spool
TIRES: 39-inch BFG Baja T/A KRT tires
WHEELS: Custom retro "kidney beans" by American Racing
WHEELBASE: 125 inches
TRACK WIDTH: 88 inches

SPECS

VEHICLE: Original Big Oly Bronco
OWNER/HOMETOWN: Parnelli Jones/Torrance, CA
CHASSIS: Custom all-tube 4130 chromoly, TIG-welded
ENGINE: 351ci Windsor
INDUCTION: E.F.I.
TRANSMISSION: Initially a Ford C-4, later a Ford C-6
FRONT SUSPENSION: Custom Twin I-Beam with front-mounted radius arms, custom center-pivot steering, captured coil spring, about 10 to 12 inches of travel
REAR SUSPENSION: Four-link with rear Panhard bar, captured coil spring, about 8 to 10 inches of travel
RING AND PINION: 4.11:1
REAR DIFFERENTIAL: Detroit Locker
TIRES: 10.00-15 Firestones custom for Parnelli Jones
WHEELBASE: About 92 inches (stock Bronco wheelbase)
TRACKWIDTH: About 68 inches (stock Bronco width)