

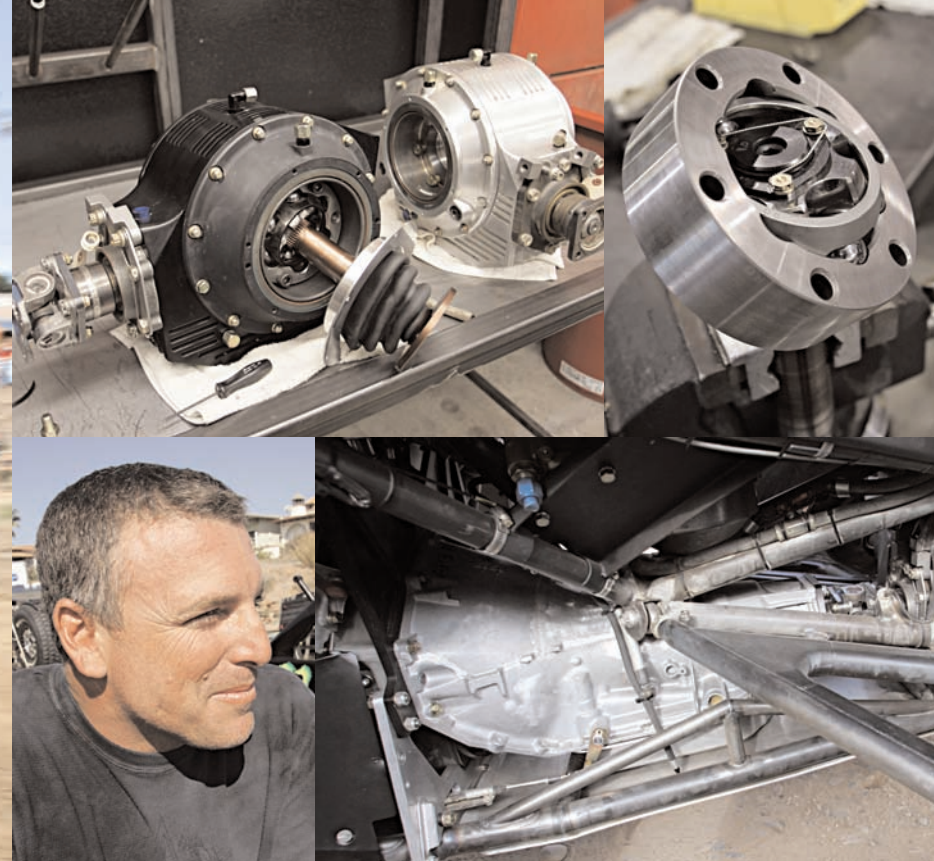
# DIRTY HARRY RAISES THE STAKES

Photos Peter Brock and Gayle Brock

Baja racer Alan Pflueger's new Trophy Truck rewrites the rules on off-road racing technology. Will his gamble pay off? **By Peter Brock**



"Dirty Harry" didn't last on its Baja 1000 debut, but all involved with the project believe it will be a huge leap forward for Trophy Truck technology.



## UNDER THE SKIN OF PFLUEGER'S TT

(ABOVE, clockwise from top) A sneak peek at the secret innards of the Harris differential; special design CVs; GM Turbo-Hydramatic transmission; Flyin' Hawaiian Alan Pflueger. (BELOW, left to right) 86-gallon fuel tank and spare wheel assembly; designer Trevor Harris.



Traction wins races; the ability to deliver consistent power to the racing surface has always ensured greater speed. It seems so simple, but in the real world of race car design, the obvious, brilliant innovation is often surpassed by less efficient, but more practical and well-proven solutions. On the Baja 1000 especially, where the terrain, weather and road surfaces are so diverse there is no simple way to dial in a perfect setup, the elements and course itself are the limiting factors. It's one reason desert competition has gained such popularity among veteran racers from other, better publicized but excessively rules-limited regimes. Innovation is encouraged, not stifled, by the rules. Under sanctioning body SCORE's enlightened and practical regulations, almost anything goes. Its unique *laissez-faire* policy is a seductive set of values that has cost the calculating and brilliant, but sometimes unwary, millions of bucks, and consistently delivered success for the wily conservatives. Alan Pflueger's latest entry in the Trophy Truck wars didn't win on its Baja 1000 debut last November, but it still has the entire TT racing establishment nervously looking over its

shoulder. With no less than a dozen new Trophy Truck designs set to appear in the 2008 season, there's a lot of money on the table. Had Pflueger's new Harris Dynamics design been successful on its first time out, all could have been made instantly obsolete. It could still happen. Trevor Harris has designed some of the world's fastest racers both on and off pavement. His Nissan-powered, 1000-horsepower IMSA GTP racers were the benchmark of that series from 1988-'91, winning four consecutive championships while his innovative Nissan off-road stadium racers, from the days of Mickey Thompson's early SCORE events, are still vividly recalled as being almost unbeatable. Now, for close to three years, under the patronage of Pflueger, Harris

has been laboring to solve the exasperating limitation that seems to separate today's best Trophy Trucks from the theoretically more sophisticated, open-wheeled Class 1 Unlimitecs that almost exclusively utilize independent rear suspensions (IRS). Harris feels that the use of a mid-engined layout, using his own unique IRS configuration, with wheel travel equaling the best of today's most successful live rear axle designs could revolutionize the sport, however, until now, no one has been brave, smart or determined enough to solve the thorny metallurgical and engineering angularity problems associated with the complex constant velocity joints required in such a sophisticated IRS system. Harris readily admits that it would be far easier to design a new live rear axle

Trophy Truck that could deliver performance superior to those now running, but that isn't what challenges his fertile mind. He's already been there and done that, with Don Tebbe, using GM's innovative in-line-six-powered Vortech Trailblazer a few seasons back. Unfortunately, GM's Vortech division disappointingly folded that program just when the two factory-backed 'Blazers were poised to dominate the series. When allowed to, Harris has always swung for the fences and his latest design for Pflueger Racing is no exception. The risk to the Flyin' Hawaiian's team and reputation is enormous, because the entire design of this new Trophy Truck is predicated on the success of a single component, a revolutionary differential

built in-house that so far has only shown tantalizing glimmers of its true potential. If it doesn't perform, the rest of the truck is just so much scrap metal, as there'd be no way to convert it back to something more conventional. The whole situation is an incredible roll of the dice for Pflueger. "We've been testing in the desert for several months now," said Alan Pflueger, just before the 1000, "and each time we've made significant progress. I feel our goal is within reach." Pflueger's current benchmark is the team's highly Harris-modified, Porter-built race truck that has won its share of demanding SCORE events in the past two seasons. "Trevor's new design is light years ahead in speed and comfort when we run side-by-side comparisons," he says. "It really inspires confidence. When we solve this CV joint issue I feel we'll have a design that will obsolete the competition for years." The "CV joint issue" is the focus of Harris's complete attention, because its solution, he says, will enable the new racer to operate at speeds others have up until now only dreamed about. Other top Trophy Truck pilots aren't quite so sure. A quick

survey of half a dozen veteran drivers just prior to November's Baja 1000 brought a resounding negative response to the long anticipated debut of the new Pflueger TT. Mark Post, the SCORE veteran who eventually won the 1000, with short course stars Rob MacCachren and Carl Renezeder, in Riviera Racing's Ford F-150, noted before the start: "That design looks very promising but there's no maturity in it as yet; it needs at least a season of hard competition before it shows the reliability of a proven design." As it turned out, all six queried drivers were correct in their assessment; Pflueger's new truck, with famed motocross racer Ricky Johnson at the helm, expired just after Check Point 1 with a failed CV. The post-race autopsy revealed