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Contextual Studies essay: Ways of perceiving

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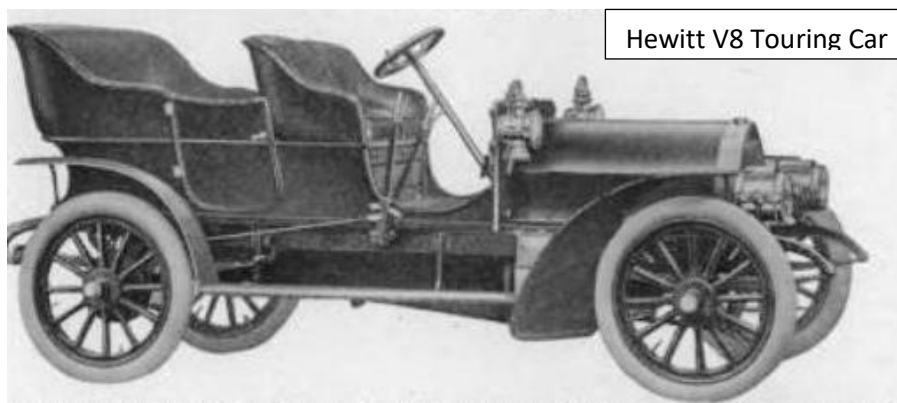
The Grand American V8 Rally

My exhibition will take the form of a large scale rally travelling the width of the United States of America. It will be in celebration of the V8 engine and its rich history in the USA where its use in bootlegging culture sparked the birth of NASCAR, one of the world's most popular motorsports. From the Prohibition era until the 1960s, bootlegging drivers modified their cars to transport moonshine or illicit alcohol to customers by increasing performance and cargo load.

My week long rally will run from New York to Long Beach in California, with four stops along the way. At the start and finish and all overnight stopping points, there will be the opportunity for visitors to view the exhibiting cars close up in a service park, as well as when they are competing.

Taking part in the exhibition rally will be any four-wheeled vehicles with a V8 engine. Modified or standard factory models are acceptable, classic cars from the bootlegging era or brand new, the only stipulation being they must house a V8 engine.

The V8 engine was invented by French designer Leon Levavasseur in 1902. After initial development, and use in speedboats and early aircraft, 1905 saw the first V8 in the automotive industry with a special world speed record car built by Darrick. Two years later, the V8 engine was introduced in the USA powering a Hewitt V8 touring car.



From 1920 to 1933, in response to religious and political pressure, a constitutional nationwide ban of the production, importation, transportation and trade of alcohol was implemented in the USA. There was still a thirst for alcohol among the American public, and an opportunity for the criminally minded was created. Illegal breweries were established in rural areas, but a way to transport their produce to the customers in towns and cities was needed. Thus bootlegging was born - drivers in customised cars adapted for increased speed and cargo, able to evade the authorities while delivering sizeable consignments of moonshine. The powerful V8 engine was a popular feature of the cars bootleggers chose to drive. Although the nationwide prohibition amendment was repealed in 1933, some states and counties maintained the ban so the bootlegging continued. Moreover, illegal alcohol trade was more profitable as no tax was paid, so continued even in areas where the ban was lifted.

Initially, bootleggers used popular cars to blend in with the city traffic, a tactic first thought of and used by legendary bootlegger, Raymond Parks. The favoured model of choice comprised 75% of the cars on American roads at the time - the *Ford Model T*, which featured a modest 2.9 litre in-line 4 cylinder engine. However, in time the authorities recognised these tactics and performance of the police fleet improved so were easily able to catch the *Model Ts*. This forced bootleggers to move into the next generation of cars, including one of the most iconic cars in the culture - the 1937 *Ford De Luxe Coupe*. This model boasted the dual benefits of a capacious cargo space of 132 gallons and a

torsion bar system giving an improved ride – a valuable factor for the drivers travelling at high speed over rugged terrain carrying a large load of highly flammable liquids. The *De Luxe Coupe* featured a flat head V8, which crucially was easily upgradable, so drivers were able to mount home-made superchargers or swap the engine for a Cadillac ambulance V8, which was the biggest at the time. As the USA motor market expanded, alternative V8 powered cars were available from other American manufacturers such as the *Chrysler New Yorker* from the 1940s, *Dodge Coronet* in the 1950s and later from 1962 the *Pontiac Le Mans*.



Chrysler New Yorker

Bootleggers upgraded their cars fearlessly in search of greater speed and performance and became very skilled drivers, although reckless. There was a competitiveness amongst the bootleggers, which led to races organised on public roads and highways. These races soon evolved into circuit races in corn fields, thus conceiving the first form of motorsport in the USA -stock car racing.

After the end of World War II, an official motor race was held in Atlanta in which many bootleggers competed, as they had developed into drivers with the most suitable skills. The promoters of the event feared that their participation would tarnish the event's image and subsequently banned them. However, these daring drivers were popular with the spectating public, who threatened to riot, forcing the organisers to retract their ban. As stock car racing progressed, several motorsport associations existed, but lacked uniformity and communication causing confusion. A former racer turned promoter, Bill France, oversaw the amalgamation of the different organisations in early 1948 to form the National Association of Stock Car Racing, or NASCAR as it is commonly known, with its first official race being held at Daytona, Florida in February of that year.

The motoring exploits of the bootleggers were popularised in modern culture and inspired films such as *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977) and *The Dukes of Hazzard* (2005, earlier tv series 1979).

My exhibition rally is an alternative celebration of bootlegging culture and the V8 engine to NASCAR. For a number of reasons, I have chosen a rally over a static motor exhibition or fixed location circuit race like NASCAR. Firstly, once a popular version of motorsport, many grand rallies have now ceased and it can be argued that a rally is a better representation of the history of the V8 engine in bootlegging than NASCAR as the exhibitors will be taking on a similar journey. It can also be said that for their design to best appreciated, cars should be viewed in motion rather than as static objects,

although it will also be an important part of the exhibition for visitors to be able to explore the cars closely in the service parks in order to see the details of modifications.

Today, there are very few large scale, grand rallies where competitors drive all day with no outside help, and those few are entirely off-road, such as the Baja 1000 and the Dakar Rally. Large scale rallies have influenced automotive design in the past, for example the eponymous Escort RS Mexico from the London to Mexico event and the Ferrari 250 TDF and F12 TDF named for the Tour de France motor rallies that circumnavigated France until 1986. My grand rally will bring large scale, long distance rallies back onto public roads, however there will be an off road element, as rallies are essentially point to point time trials across multiple terrain types.

Although, as logistically necessary, the on-road route of the rally will be set, the off-road sections of my rally will be less restrictive. This will enable slower straight line vehicles with the ability to adapt and travel over rough terrain to compete with faster road cars by taking a quicker route, for example *Ford F-150* truck v *Dodge Demon* muscle car and *Chevrolet Corvette* supercar. The result will be an exciting exhibition of a wide range of vehicle types and display of driver skills and tactics.

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