

THE SALEEN TRUCK

but soon put the idea on the back burner and went about our day jobs at Ford Truck. That changed when I got a call directly from Rivard's secretary that Dan wanted to see me that afternoon. At that time, in the Ford culture, someone at my level did not go directly to the Chief Engineer. There were five levels of chain of command that needed to know what, how, and who had the Chief Engineer's ear. I told my boss of the meeting and he was not happy. He knew he could not stop it from happening and that all he could do was tell his boss, and the boss's boss, and so on. I knew I would have to brief the whole chain on the meeting but when I mentioned it was on *Truck Motorsports*, the bosses lost interest. I could not tell Dan much during the meeting as the team had not made much progress as we sort of shelved the idea. Dan was not happy! I was directed to aggressively pursue something—but what? Then, out of the blue, my *Road & Track* magazine arrived with the teaser in the editor's column about the upcoming Battle of the Nutwork Stars. I pitched the idea to the team and then took the proposal to Dan who bought in to the idea. Now all we had to do is convince John Dinkle to allow us to participate.

About a week went by before I got a call from John Dinkle with news that the staff and he could see no reason to not invite us. We were now officially invited to participate. We decided that the Ranger pickup truck would be the best platform to try to road race. Dan had kicked a small budget of around \$50,000 to me (unheard of in that day, but that is another story). So, I cut a couple 2.9L V-6 Rangers from the heard and headed out to Jack Roush Engineering to see what they could do to build a roll cage into the trucks and how long it would take. The folks at Roush were game to give it a go. A week and a half later we had two trucks with roll cages. Then we decided we needed to lower the trucks, so we flipped the rear axle above the leaf spring and lowered

Car Engineering that we were not going to have much luck getting the trucks to handle. Stand back and watch us. One drawback was that our team of five racers became three; two engineers bowed out due to workload. Since this was a skunkworks project we had to develop the trucks during



after hours sessions on the handling track. Time was our enemy, and progress was slow at first. We got a balance between front spring rates and rear spring rates along with Monroe take-apart shocks. As we got a package together, the trucks started to perform. Our lap times on the handling track started to tumble. We knew that we were doing okay when we broke the Truck track record one night. Dan Rivard was a regular attendee at our sessions and even flogged the trucks on occasion. He was there when we broke the record and the smile on his face was all the encouragement we needed. Our tire pyrometer reading showed even temps across the tread of our shaved Goodyear tires, so we were optimistic that we could hold our own at Lime Rock. With no time left to continue development of the trucks, we buttoned up the trucks. However, a problem occurred: I could not get vehicle control to schedule to pick up the Ranger racetrucks and deliver them to Lime Rock. Back to Roush I went. It happened that the Trans Am transporter was available, so I hired Roush to transport the trucks. Before we headed out, I had Roush install water-cooled brakes on the trucks as we had to use standard OEM brake pads and shoes.

The team headed to Lime Rock, taking turns driving a pool Econoline. Ford PR got involved and decided we needed a "name" racer and selected Bill Stroppe driver Manny Esquerra to be one of the drivers. We decided I would pair with Andy Gordon and Rob Stevens would pair with Manny.

At Lime Rock, the Roush transporter arrived early and unloaded the Rangers. We arrived about half a day later and checked into the Wake Robin Inn and headed to the track. To make a long story short, that day we were the butt end of all the jokes about our little Ranger pickup trucks. Even the Ford Car Engineering team offered no support, only more jokes.



the front by cutting a few coils off the front suspension. Since these trucks were twin I beam like their big brother the F150, we were told by the vehicle dynamics folks in