

Bill Packard Phoenix Super Gas ♦ '71 Vega

Even before Bill "Grumpy" Jenkins added to his legacy with the first successful Pro Stock Vega in 1972 and before the Vega became the preeminent Funny Car body style of the early 1970s, Bill Packard had a soft spot in his heart for them.

"I was always interested in Vegas," said Packard, 47. "I liked them when I was a teenager; they were hot cars on the streets back in the early 1970s."

Packard built his first one in 1996, but he always wanted one with a round-tube chassis. One day, he found one.

"I saw a guy in Phoenix bring out a primed one, and I always had my eye on it," he said. "The guy even won a couple races with it. Finally, I saw it in the *Auto Trader*, and we made a deal."

After buying the car, which was built to be a Pro Stocker but never saw action in that class, Packard fitted it with a 385-cid small-block Chevy.

"I bought it as a roller, and when I got it, it was set up for a big-block," he said. "We rewired it and plumbed it and added all the electronics you need to run Super Gas."

Packard also built the engine, something not many Super-class racers do anymore.

"I always prided myself on building my own engines," said Packard, an auto tech who first raced more than 30 years ago before taking several years off in the 1990s. "Building engines is my thing. I've always liked trying to get a

smaller cubic inch engine to run speed like the big-block cars do."

The car features Dart cylinder heads ported by Dean Turk, an Edelbrock Super Victor manifold fitted to Packard's adapter, Holley 900 4150 Series carburetor, Venolia pistons, Eagle rods, Ohio crankshaft, Comp Cams belt system, Crower shaft rockers, and a crank-trigger ignition. Power is applied to the track via a BTE Powerglide transmission, Road Runner torque converter, and Ford nine-inch rear end with a 4.86:1 ring-and-pinion. A ladder-bar suspension, aluminum Centerline wheels, and Goodyear rubber complete the package.

For Packard and crewmember Josh Faris, the season has gotten off to a promising start. After going three rounds with the wheelstanding Vega at the season opener in Pomona, Packard went a couple of rounds in Phoenix, and he currently is in the top 25 in the national standings. He bowed out in the second round on a -.004 red-light that was particularly frustrating because it was coupled to an excellent 9.901 run.

