



FUEL FOR THOUGHT

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WHAT'S A LAND SPEED RECORD WORTH?

This is serious. It is about real speed matters, ones that lie at the heart of all land speed racing – class records and those highly sought after bragging rights. Bonneville has my heart so this discussion will revolve around salty accomplishments. Weather permitting, anyone with a safely built dream may participate in one of the three time trials held out on the great white dyno each year: SCTA's Speedweek in August, USFRA's World of Speed in September and SCTA's World Finals in October. If your pockets are bulging with cash you may also obtain a permit from the BLM and hold a private meet.

Any of these venues provide the opportunity to set a land speed record. The chest-puffing pitside debate starts when you talk about the type of record. SCTA and USFRA recognize records set at any of the three annual events. Private time is another matter, but usually brings the FIA (Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) into the picture because speed hopefuls are vying for world record status.

USFRA and SCTA use the term "International" when referring to world records and this is the crux of our discussion here today. Although the FIA has long been recognized as the world authority, its conduct towards and treatment of land speed racers has been nothing short of deplorable.

I have investigated this sore point for several years, have participated in several FIA world record attempts and have held numerous discussions with SCTA and USFRA officials about what constitutes a class record and how they view world records.

It is imperative to remember that SCTA and USFRA are vibrant, well-run non-profit associations ONLY because so many selfless people volunteer their time towards the betterment of the sport. The FIA is mainly paid staff and therefore seeks revenue streams to keep it afloat. Formula One does that quite nicely, but there are a multitude of other moneymaking enterprises in which the FIA is also engaged. Check out www.FIA.com to see for yourself.

Because there is no "prize money" in land speed racing, nor very little other sources other than a few modest sponsorship agreements, and only a few televised special programs and relatively limited print coverage, the FIA, I am guessing here, doesn't want to be bothered with the sport. I say this because the so-called "official" listing for certified Land Speed Records is shamefully out of date and contains a multitude of errors and omissions.

For instance, Bob and Bill Summers' Goldenrod 409 record is listed among the supercharged vehicles when any good history buff knows they ran four normally aspirated Hemis. Rick White and Fred Larsen's record speeds are listed, but their names are missing. Don and Rick Vesco's 458 record is still in paperwork limbo.

OK, why am I getting into such a lather about this? There is a big group of land speed racers who could give a moldy fig about trying to satisfy the stringent rules and regs necessary for FiA world record designation, to them the personal achievement is enough and they don't believe a foreign timing authority adds anything to the feat.

However, others have died trying to obtain one. Nolan White among them. That's enough for me, but still others have waited months -- even years -- for that all-important certificate to arrive in the mail officially recognizing the record. How inexcusably rude.

I ask for nothing special, make no inroad, or upset any apple carts with this statement. The FiA Sport Technical Department, states in Article 232 of Appendix D "The FiA shall keep an up-to-date register of all international and national records established or broken the section devoted setting speed records."

This statement is repeated in the Fia's own charter in Article 106. I submit that if a racer put such faith into a record certification body then the racer, *at the very least, deserves the common courtesy of having their triumphs cataloged in a timely and appropriate manner.*

The blame for this woeful condition may lie in many areas. Long-time noted and respected timer Dave Petrali and I have decided to try to unravel this boondoggle. SCTA/BNI's Mike Cook is also involved; tough frustrated after years of dead-ends. We're enlisting the aid of US and European officials to "get credit given where credit is due." If it means taking a trip to Switzerland or France sorting through paperwork, then let's get busy.

In the mean time, consider this: With all due respect to the long tenure of the FIA's devotion to speed records, I wonder why the SCTA/BNI has not, or will not, step up and take over as the "World Authority" of land speed record racing.

I am aware that they are mainly a volunteer group, but this is their life-blood -- record setting -- and it has been doing a damn fine job of holding regularly scheduled time trials for more than 60 years. The lion's share of world records have been set on the Bonneville Salt Flats and no group is better suited to handle the chore than the SCTA/BNI.

If the FIA ignores the land speed racer because there is no money to be made, then does the SCTA/BNI not take up the duty because it does not have the staff, or funds to do so? Don't kid yourself, record keeping and certification takes money. I am utterly convinced that if the FIA chooses to ignore the efforts of world record land speed hopefuls, then the SCTA/BNI has an irrevocable duty to answer the challenge.

SPEED NOTE: Let's raise our glass to salute Dr. Jeanie Pflum, who at the 2002 SCTA/BNI World Finals became the second woman to join the 300MPH chapter of the 200MPH

Club by tickling the traps with a 302 record in the E/Blown Fuel Lakester class that pumped up the record 10 miles per hour. Pflum was driving Seth "Hammond's gorgeous #77 lakester tuned by her crafty dad, Lee Gustafson. Pflum noted, "the men on the team are strong enough to let the women play and they truly get excited when the women excel."

Can someone tell me why it should be any other way?

SPEED NOTE: For 2003 the Air Force Reserve Command Recruiting Service has teamed up with the "Smoke-N-Thunder" jet dragster to perform at 15 nation-wide air shows. Owned and operated by Scott and Linda Hammack of Corona, Calif., the dragster has been streaking down runways at speeds in excess of 350 mph for more than 20 years with a 100 percent safety record. The AFRC Recruiting Service hopes the jet increase the public's awareness of the Reserve Program. Having raced jets with Linda and Scott many years ago, before words and pictures became my stock and trade, this announcement is of particular pleasure to me, the Air Force is about to find out that they sponsored one of racing's most professional, reliable, gracious and pleasant couple and our nation will be better for the Air Force having done so.