



FUEL FOR THOUGHT

BY LANDSPEED LOUISE

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Thrusters and Hounds

When it comes to the Absolute World Land Speed Record the British have a secret weapon that we Americans are sadly, sorely lacking.

Desire.

I am fully confident that America has more than an abundant supply of engineering proficiency to conquer any challenge a speed record might present. The same goes for talented operational team and crew members.

What we don't have is a Richard Noble. This guy, who at times has been the most insufferable, simultaneous hemorrhoid and headache inducing man to ever walk upright, is also responsible for single-handedly making the United Kingdom the ones to beat at speed.

I am awed by his tenacity and conviction. That Lizzie hasn't knighted him tells me the old girl is clueless about this guy's intrinsic national value. Same goes for aerodynamicist Ron Ayers.

Noble had plenty of help. It's foolish to think he would have been able to achieve a blessed thing without lots of folks behind him, but this guy can lead like no one else in the game.

The closest we have in the USA is John Force, but he's too busy drag racing and has ignored all my pleas to visit Bonneville.

I said all of this, and more, to the assembled lunch crowd at the Coventry Transport Museum last October where I was the guest of RAF Air Commodore Jayne Millington, during the 30th

Anniversary celebration of Thrust2 snapping up the World Speed Record from the Blue Flame.

My concluding public remark:

"If the USA had a Noble equivalent rest assured we will come kick your butts." Great laughter ensued.

Alas, their collective keesters are safe for now. The once unstoppable Craig Breedlove squandered his chances in 1996 and 1997, capable only of posting the unenviable world's longest skid mark and world's fastest U-turn to his speed resume.

Steve Fossett bought Breedlove's jet car and was killed just as the revamped "FossettLSR" was ready for its trial runs towards 800MPH. Fossett's widow is still trying to sell it. As the only person to have been a member of both teams, when I think about the languishing American designed and built speed machine that never had a chance to proven itself it makes me want to drink heavily.

After lunch and champagne we were treated to a grand film cut together by Ken Norris' son, John, of the 1983 World Record events that included footage of Gary Gabelich salt hanging out with the Thrust 2 team!

Also in attendance was the ever smiling, jovial John Ackroyd who made the trip up from the Isle of Wight. Dressed in the same team overalls from 3 decades past, I am sure I wasn't the only one who noticed the perfect fit!

It is critical that I report Mr. Noble, O.B.E. has been transformed. Thank fiancé Jo Finch, a Bloodhound Education Ambassador for "domesticating" Noble against all odds. The guy is now safe inviting to dinner, if for no other reason than also spend time with congenial Jo. The woman is a miracle worker. I wonder if her family knew Helen Keller.

The Coventry museum houses the two fastest cars on Earth: Thrust2 and ThrustSSC. In 1983, Richard Noble drove Thrust2 to a 633MPH world record then in 1997 led the ThrustSSC team to break the sound barrier on land at 763mph. The remarkable story is recounted in the Spirit of Speed Gallery where a simulator of the supersonic runs is a "must do" for

every visitor.

The gallery and cars are about to get a "makeover" as Chief Executive Gay Hall announced to the group a building expansion that will move both cars into new, more prominent digs in the near future.

A few days later I spent a full day on Brands Hatch Racetrack driving the tires off an Audi R8 V10, Callaway twin turbo Corvette, Lotus Exige, Jaguar XJ220, Porsche 911 GT3 R (type 997) and Toyota GT86.

Clockwise Brands Hatch, learning to drive quick and smooth from the passenger seat (all British steering wheels poke out of the glove box) is challenge enough but then add an 8-turn multi-elevation road course with off-camber turns and it rivets your attention every second.

Factor in that I changed cars every 5 to 10 laps. Any trepidation I may have had regarding my new "clutch leg knee" handling the repeated pressure demands evaporated by late morning and I was happily cutting competition lap times by early afternoon. Forget the mall, give me pit row any day!

VW loaned me a sure-footed, very obedient lime green Scirocco that became my trusted travel pal. Never once did it lose a moment's grip during repeated torrential downpours followed by eye-brow-raising butt clenching motorway road spray.

Moisture mayhem was minimized as I made my way across the island to spend a day at the Bloodhound SSC extreme technology project in Bristol. I came away very sad that the USA does not have such an intriguing project that will excite American youth the way the Brits are connecting their children to science, technology, engineering and math.

There are about 25 people working full-time daily with others flowing in and out as needed. The main chassis section is constructed, as is the composite front intake and driver section. The front and rear suspension sections will be connected by the time you read this.

Assembly and Build Lead Chris Dee, who also wrangled the JCB Dieselmex, showed me countless details, pointing out the car will eventually have in excess of 20,000 rivets bonding the skin to the frame.

Upstairs, the only sound was soft keyboard clatter overseen by "Vicar" Mark Chapman, aka Chief Engineer, and some 15 of his quietest church mice, aka design engineers, working out one design requirement after another with all eyes

fixed on their respective monitors.

My big mouth shattered all that when I gave the whole room a hearty tenor Yankee "Hello, if you are not doing something important, please come sign my book," referring to 138 page "The Science Behind the Speed," a gift from Ron Ayers.

It was heartwarming to reconnect with Engineering Lead Brian Coombs and operations Director Martyn Davidson (who did the same job for ThrustSSC).

The Army sent over six bright sparks from the Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers who exercise as much as they design. SSgt Rob Pattinson was just starting to work out details for the rocket engine and I put him together with Ray Dausman who designed and built the Blue Flame rocket motor.

Enormous thanks goes out to my favorite speed wrinkle and Chief Aerodynamicist Ron Ayers for acting as my Bloodhound speed shepherd. From ThrustSSC, to Dieselmex and now Bloodhound, this man's enthusiastic contributions to the sport are as valuable as they are a sparkling viewpoint to going fast on land. I cherish his friendship and revere his never-ending willingness to share speed secrets.

It's the same for all the 'hounds; they are all brilliant, capable, friendly and on a national speed mission. Well, everyone, save "Mr. Cranky Wanky" but he's been petulant since ThrustSSC and could have benefited from distemper shots when working on the British steam car.

America is running out of real estate to conduct absolute speed battles safely. Thanks to a neglectful, almost abusive management style, the Bureau of Land Management has all but condemned the Bonneville Salt Flats into obsolescence.

Nevada's Black Rock is finished while Steve Fossett's Diamond Valley chosen site is unproven largely due to the BLM demanding nearly \$40,000 in use fees from race teams.

The Alvord Desert in Oregon, site of Kitty O'Neil's 512MPH runs, holds great promise if it is dry enough. The North American Eagle managed a couple 550MPH test runs on a rain-shortened 7-mile course in October 2013.

Nevertheless, I am very worried that the USA might never get a chance to spank the Brits at speed if Bloodhound turns a wheel on South African playa Hakskeen Pan.

Note: Photojournalist Louise Ann Noeth is the authoress of the critically acclaimed, "Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth." A massive update is underway to chronicle the first century of speed on the salt. A noted expert on the sport of land speed racing, she consults with industry, government and media on a variety of levels and disciplines. For more details on her fast self go to: www.landspeedproductions.biz.



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