Get ‘Em While They’re Young

Don Ferguson III

Rhonnie Vesco

Tomorrow’s land speed records are dependent on today’s lessons learned. Today’s lessons are taught not just by experience, but also by educators who implant the rudiments of knowledge empowering the student to improve on the existing. Yesterday’s idea that the racing ranks will replenish themselves is foolhardy.

One pass through the pits tells you that the vast majority of the sport’s participants are collecting social security benefits – or at least look like they ought to – gray hair abounds.

One by one, the pioneers who carved out the fastest motor sport in the world are dying, leaving behind legacies that could go unchallenged because today too few are joining the collective team that dares to innovate.

If America’s youth doesn’t get invited by today’s speedsters how will they find their way to the flying mile? I have sat in many a pit discussing the need for younger people to join the sport. In the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s, it was common to see kids out at the dry lakes and Bonneville time trials. Dear old dad, uncle, gramps, et al. would convey the go-fast tribal knowledge to the youngsters and the sport prospered.

Those kids grew up, then gray, and brought fewer kids.

Today the sport is in trouble. Its very survival requires a constant injection of new talent hungry to commit speed deeds. I know you must think me in a hallucinogenic state when the staging lines at Speedweek can be several hours long, but that’s a short-term condition.

I’m looking forward a few years. Call it long-term planning, a stewardship if you like. We can’t evolve if we don’t have an educated pool of people upon which we can rely for answers to questions that may not be evident for years to come.

For my part, I’ve thrown in with the National Network of Digital Schools to inspire the young among us.

The on-line, interactive lessons will use land speed racing as the foundation to teach basic engineering subjects such as electrical, electronic, safety, software, costs, personnel management, vehicle development, aerodynamics, fluid dynamics, thermodynamics, fabrication and alternative fuels and engines.

Dick Keller, the man responsible for The Blue Flame rocket car that set the World Land Speed Record at 630MPH in 1970, was inspired by the wonders of the US space program.

The idea of putting a human being on the moon simply fascinated the see-seeers out of the Wisconsin kid who craved kinship with the outer space magicians we call engineers. Keller, along with thousands of kids, was enthralled with the space race and educational curricula in the ‘60s, which soon ballooned with courses in science, technology, and math. Long before nerd was a word, the proverbial slide rule and mechanical pencil were the modern day equivalents of a magic wand and book of sorcery. Hundreds of students matriculated out of American universities with degrees in a wide variety of disciplines and fields of study. Interestingly, as the space program faded, so too did the number of students entering and earning engineering and science degrees.

Britain is facing a shortage of smart. However, Richard Noble, Ron Ayers, John Piper and Andy Green have put in the fix with the BloodhoundSSC World Land Speed Racing project.

The primary goal is not only to set a new World Land Speed Record at 1,000 miles per hour on land, but to invigorate students to take up a science or engineering study path. It will be years before we see tangible results from BloodhoundSSC or the NNDS Engineering the Future Series, but ya gotta start somewhere.

If you would like to see this on-line lesson plan offered at your local schools, contact Mrs. Caroline Hardman at caroline.hardman@nnndsonline.org for details on how to make that happen.

For now, I call your attention to those who are already in the hunt, in which the future rests. Certainly not a complete list, many pardons to those overlooked, but be aware of these up-and-coming speed centurions:

- Mikey Cook, who understands the incalculable value of being handed the keys to the Cook racing kingdom;
- Speed stud Don Ferguson III, also past 300MPH in the family streamliner and immersed up to his stubby hair follicles with SCTA volunteer service;
- Laura Klock and daughters Erika and Karlee Cobb are a record-setting trio on motorcycles;
- Bobby Green just keeps on inching up the record list driving the vintage style Old Crow belly tank lakester;
- Les Leggitt’s engine-building protégés Brandon Leggitt and Brent Morris are learning the meaning of power plant perfection from the sports revered and feared mechanical surgeon;
- Rick Yakoucci who was unstoppable on his Hayabusa and now wants to spank the vintage motor classes with a Costella streamliner;
- David Cooke and all the Buckeye Bullet students who have shown us all the potential of electric and hydrogen powered vehicles;
- Leslie Porterfield, of High Five Cycles in Dallas has already proven that her high-speed crash was a temporary set-back when she nattily nailed a 240MPH come-back record;
- Heidi and Clay Fitkin race a Geo Metro Coupe powered by asnowmobile engine that keeps them in greasy hands;
- Utah Valley State University instructor, Todd Low, drives a 200MPH plus El Camino an A Gas Coupe that was built and wrenched by his students;
- Brian Reilly came from Bellingham, Washington to help crew on Dan Wright’s streamliner, which he also helped fabricate;
- Kevin Winders nabbed a 123MPH record at 2009 World of Speed driving his grandpa-built diesel streamliner;
- Kevin and Ryan LeFevres grew up hanging out with Mr. Mitech motor head dad Mike, so it’s no surprise they built and run a modified roadster;
- Curtis Halvorsen who built the

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Engine, now drives the Mormon Missile diesel streamliner for Lynn Goodfellow;

-Donny Cummins, drives a roadster and is on Leggitt’s nostalgia funny car crew; his granddad was Don Cummins of the Larsen and Cummins streamliner fame;

-Ken Hardman who built a racecar for his senior college thesis running at El Mirage and now works for Dodge and hits speeds in excess of 300MPH with a four-cylinder.

Note: Photojournalist Louise Ann Noeth is the author of the award-winning book, “Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth,” a complete historical review of the first 30 years of land speed racing now in its 7th and final printing. Publisher MBI has informed Noeth when the cur-
rent inventory is sold the book will not be reprinted. For more details and to order, go to: www.landspeedproductions.biz. [2]

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**Gazette Pick – cont’d from Pg. 181**

**Goodguys Great Northwest Nats - Gazette Pick – cont’d from Pg. 181**

**TECH INFO**  
Owner: Mark and Heather Murray  
Edmonds, WA  
Year: 1954  
Make: Ford 2dr Ranch Wagon  
Engine:  
1994 Ford Mustang 5.0L with fuel injection, Ford Motorsport headers, a custom exhaust.  
Drivetrain:  
C4 transmission.  
Chassis:  
Stock with dropped spindles and lowering blocks. Rack & pinion steering, Ford 9” rear, disc front brakes, drum rear.  
Wheels/Tires:  
Chrome steelies with ’49 Ford hubcaps and wide whites.  
Body:  
Interior:  
Red leather upholstery, modified stock dash with Classic Instruments gauges, Le Carra Mark 10 steering wheel.

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**Goodguys Pacific Northwest Nats - Gazette Pick – cont’d from Pg. 105**

**TECH INFO**  
Owner: Steve Wilfong  
Port Townsend, WA  
Year: 1932  
Make: Ford five-window  
Engine:  
322ci Buick Nailhead from an old CHP car, Edelbrock intake, three Stromberg 97’s, Smitty’s mufflers.  
Drivetrain:  
‘39 Ford transmission.  
Chassis:  
Original stock frame, dropped front axle, ‘40 Ford rear axle, ‘40 Ford juice brakes.  
Wheels/Tires:  
Body:  
1932 Ford five-window coupe. Stock, untouched vintage black lacquer paint, white upholstered top insert and running boards.  
Interior:  
Vintage white tuck-n-roll, original dash with Stewart Warner gauges, stock steering wheel, chrome garnishings.

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Call about space availability for your son or grandson to attend a CRA Hot Rod Camp next year. Also an autographed copy of Dale & Jeannie’s book, From Hot Rods to Heaven with photos of rods, cus-
toms, and some of your friends is available by writing ($10.00+postage) CRA, P.O. Box 309, Valley Springs, CA 95252. (209) 786-0524; cra@integrity.com. Website: christianrodders-racers. [3]