



# Fuel For Thought

Landspeed Louise

## From Salt Virgin to Record and Red Hat

– Poland Has a New First Lady of Speed

Land speed racing is not an exclusively American past time. It's joys and woes are enjoyed by many enthusiasts throughout the world. At every salt event you'll find people from as close as Canada, usually a few from Europe, especially the UK, and a contingent from "down under" shows up fairly regularly representing Australia



Zofia Peda-Proffit  
Fastest Woman in Poland  
276.525 mph 8/22/08  
284.492 mph 08/23/08  
New Record 280.508

and New Zealand. The occasional Asian speedster, or South African gear head is also drawn to the salt, making the sport truly international in scope.

This past year was no exception. This month is devoted to a gal who now lays claim to the title: "Fastest Woman in Poland". Zofia Peda-Proffit. Like most Polish citizens, she didn't know anything

about land speed racing until her husband, Jim, introduced her to the Ferguson family back in 2002.

The desert geography, land speed racing, record-setting cars - it was all new and she never dreamed that someday she would become part of its storied history. Zofia toured the Ferguson family workshop in Wilmington, California, where she first saw the streamliner that would carry her to speed record glory years later, after they attended a few speed meets at El Mirage and Bonneville.

When I met the porcelain-skinned, elegant lady in the Ferguson pit, she explained that as she learned more about the tradition of dry lakes racing, she became impressed not only with the speed and cars, but also with the people involved in the sport. Sounded like an old-fashioned case of salt fever to me.

Known for their "seat-sharing" generosity, the Fergusons offered Zofia a chance to drive the streamliner.

"I didn't hesitate for a moment," she told me, "It was going to be a one-of-a-kind experience! It took us a few years before we were able to come back to Bonneville and by then I had the right attitude and fire suit with a polish flag hand-stitched on."

Zofia wasn't scared about going fast anywhere near as much as she was concerned about her driving skills impacting safety.

"I didn't have any training in operating this kind of vehicle," she confessed, "I was torturing the Ferguson Racing crew with

hundreds of questions. At the end it turned out they were right, there is no way to explain how to drive the streamliner, you just learn as you go! However, all the tips I got from them were very useful when I was finally on my own in the car!"

As a Bonneville rookie, she was required to make several licensing runs on the short course to earn the desired, plus 200MPH driving licenses. Not surprisingly, the first pass was the most difficult.

"I simply didn't know how the car was going to behave," she recalled, "The next run I was feeling more comfortable, but it doesn't mean relaxed! Driving at high speed requires a lot of attention. Everything happens quickly and you have to focus on what's going on, what to do next."

Rookie runs done, the sleek red-and-white streamliner, now carrying Al Teague's celebrated "76" on its tail, was, as Zofia noted, prepared for the "big one". The afternoon of August 22nd will long remain vivid in her memory. C'mon, let's join her on a ride down toward floating mountain...

"The weather was beautiful," she observed, "Friends helped me once again into the car, buckled me down, made sure I was OK. I received last directions from Don Ferguson, kissed my husband goodbye and began my record run."

This time the feeling was a little different - It seemed like it took forever before I was ready to put it in second gear. As soon as I did it, however, the streamliner 'got its wings.' Everything was going well: RPM was rising as I shifted; the car was stable and went straight as an arrow.

In the last couple of miles it was surprisingly calm! Because of the smooth salt surface and open space ahead of me I didn't really feel the speed...until I passed the 5-mile mark and opened the parachute! Fortunately the crew warned me the car would shake. I slowed down, looked for the turnout road, stopping

when I was far enough from the course, unbuckled, opened the top and saw a cloud of smoke!"

Ms. Peda-Proffit thought she had broken the car and her elation for having made a clean pass became imbued with tears - she thought she may have hurt the 'liner. No worries. The team explained she had qualified for a new record and would soon arrive at the impound area joining other record hopefuls.

"I was stunned when I received the official time print out of 276.525 mph!"

Even though my bloodstream was full of adrenalin I had no problem sleeping that night - four runs in one day was really tiring!"

The next morning, up before dawn to participate in 7AM record runs that start each day's racing, she admired the sunrise over the salt flats. I am most amused at Zofia's new perspective of speed, cultivated in only four runs - she was living a dream wide-awake and already yearning for wide-open throttle.

"I was a little concerned about having some trouble right after the start," she confessed, "I knew after that it would be no problem to back-up the record, but it is rather hard to keep the streamliner at low speed - it just wants to go fast!"

Again I was lucky - the weather was beautiful, no wind, the air refreshing; only the rising sun was in my eyes - a problem fixed with a piece of sticky-tape on the windshield.

This run was even easier - I took the advice on how to improve my start and it worked out well. My exit speed was 286.154 mph! I proved that my score was not just good luck. I was learning something each time. I did a wild dance, hugged everyone around (including the car) and posed for a few photos with a big smile on my face!"

That driving performance earned Zofia a new record of 280.508 mph and entrée to the Bonneville 200MPH Club - a great honor for her to be part of the history of Bonneville.

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Ferguson Streamliner





Horst Rösler

"I have a lot of respect for people who share a passion for land speed racing and work very hard to keep it alive and exciting by setting higher and higher records. There are 15 women in the 2 Club - I have the pleasure to be one of them and the only Polish person!"

A week on the salt was a wonderful experience for not only Zofia, but beaming hubby Jim couldn't have been prouder and the Ferguson crew cut another notch in their "well-done" belt. She now understands why, despite the lack of sleep, sun and heat, the pressure of racing and fixing the vehicles, and that most people are friendly and have great sense of humor.

"A big part of the atmosphere of Speedweek is due to the work of volunteers from S.C.T.A and BNI - everyone from people at the information desk to the marshals at the starting line welcomed me with big smiles!

Bonneville 2008 will forever be one of the most memorable events in my life!

The Ferguson's gave me much more than just a chance to drive their car: I experienced the thrill of going over 280 mph, and got the "red hat", but I had the opportunity to test my skills in very unusual conditions and I've gained self confidence and learned that dreams can come true if you are brave enough to give it a try!"

Delighted to simply watch the mechanical circus play out before her on the saline expanse, she smiled wryly noting "it's much more fun to drive than just watch! And I became the Fastest Polish Girl!"

#### Book Review

My jolly, hard-shooting colleague Horst Rösler brings to print a book every LSR enthusiast ought to park on their library shelves: *Bonneville: World's Fastest Motorcycle*.

The hardbound, 128-page, full-color

book is a perfect compliment to my book, *Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth* and provides readers with a detailed, often personal account of how the two-wheelers play the speed game on the great white dyno.

You can tell the guy, who emulates Johnny Cash with his perpetual black attire, has spent plenty of time getting cooked in the sun by the crisp, clean photos that grace every page.

Much of author Rösler's book centers around the action-packed 2006 season.

More than 150 bikes made the salt their home for one week in September that year, including three streamliners that battled for the "World's Fastest Motorcycle" crown. By week's end the mark had risen to 350MPH and Chris Carr was the two-wheeled maestro aboard Denis Manning's "7".

At the close of the 2008 season, Rocky Robinson, riding Ack Attack, pumped the world record up to 360MPH. He called me from the road traveling back home from Bonneville noting that the achievement had yet to settle in with him, but I could sense a mixed emotion of relief and exhilaration in his voice. I asked him if he had seen Rösler's book and he replied:

"It's really good. I enjoyed it because it covered so many different bikes. Of course, the recounting of our 2006 three-way battle was my favorite, but it's obvious that Horst has a real good eye, he shoots neat machines from a different perspective, artistically, instead of how I normally view them - from a mechanical angle."

Who could disagree with Rösler's take on land speed racing that notes: "The energy that makes Bonneville work isn't gasoline, it's the drive of the teams, each trying to break a record or simply meet a self-imposed goal."

Pick it up for \$29.95 at your local bookstore, or surf for it online using the ISBN code of 1929133456 - you'll be glad you did.

Note: Photojournalist Louise Ann Noeth is the authoress of the award-winning book, *Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth*, a complete historical review of the first 50 years of land speed racing now in its 7th and final printing. Publisher MBI has informed Noeth when the current inventory is sold the book will not be reprinted. For more details and to order, go to: [www.landspeedproductions.biz](http://www.landspeedproductions.biz).



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