



Fuel For Thought

Landspeed Louise

Trouble In Television Land

At Speedweek 2008, I was hired as an Associate Producer at Big Fish Entertainment to help develop a one-hour special on land speed racing. Initially, I was very enthused, having worked with this production company that produced two high caliber LSR specials for National Geographic in 2006.

When Big Fish sold Discovery Channel on another LSR show and secured a very respectable budget, I was asked to put together the racer list that focused on young people.

OK, pipe down; I can hear you laughing out loud even now. Yes, the sport is overwhelmed with folks over 50, but there are also plenty of youthful personalities. Naturally, the requested list would

hours of footage had been shot. I offered to help edit back in the Washington, D.C. studios, but my input ended once the raw footage was shot.

I waited, like all of you, to see what Discovery would demand of Big Fish in the final cut. Sitting in our hearth room, my husband, Mick, and I tuned in to watch the prime time show with great anticipation.

By the end of the show, "Bonneville: The Speed Capital of the World," I was mentally paralyzed trying to make sense of the story line. Like an arrow well shot, but awkwardly aimed, the story missed the mark.

The three teams spotlighted certainly enjoyed the limelight, but I observed the sport "took it on the chin" too many times and left viewers with a distorted experience of its true spirit.

I had asked about 300 people to watch the show and provide unvarnished feedback. Those who were not directly involved with motorsports loved the show and raved about wanting more. However, for those in the sport, most were disappointed and some were absolutely furious.

I agreed with aspects on both sides. The camera work was brilliant, but the editing was crammed full of "designer quick cuts" and many people were annoyed with the constant summarization, like "embedded teasers" after each commercial break.

If folks miss part of the show, let 'em tune in to watch it again, or buy the DVD, not use ultra-valuable air time to show us what they have already shown us.

I blew a head gasket when I counted Gail Phillips'

streamliner crash had been looped/shown ten times. What the hell were the editors thinking? With all the great footage in the can why had they stooped to such sensationalism? I knew these folks were better than this.

I was grateful the show handled Gail's tumble all the way through, giving her on-camera time after she got back from being checked out at hospital -- once again proving the inestimable value of the SCTA/BNI safety rules and racing regulations. But showing the crash 10 times?

Although saddened by my first adven-

ture into producing (and maybe my last after this column is published) I know there is a better story in all the hours and hours of footage that simply did not get told.

Racer Mark Bracewell must have read my thoughts and weighed saying, "I'm glad the show was done but I am personally quite sick of the 'MTV editing mentality' that has taken over seemingly every docu-drama type of production.

There is no reason on the face of the video earth to have a shot only on the screen for a tenth-of-a-second. This rapid-fire visual, contrary to the young technical folks ideas, does not impart excitement to the production it imparts stupidity. If you are going to do a documentary then do one, not a damn music video."

I firmly believe what transpires out on the salt (and in the shops and on the road) is a cracking good story enough, one that does not require embellishment.

Dr. Greg Meyers, a holder of two Bonneville records with his Studebaker Coupe believes Discovery should pony up for a re-edit. His comments mirror what many LSR folks told me.

"I watched with my wife, who has never been out to the salt with me, but has been very supportive found the show alarming.

It did not promote the image that I believe any salt racers would want their families or friends to see. Images of crashes over and over does only one thing..., sells soap to idiots.

SCTA works very hard to promote safety, and it would have been very appropriate to discuss WHY Gail Phillips came out unscathed.

The three featured teams are about as far from the typical salt-racers as one could get. We raced our car and set two records on a total of about \$15,000 over four years, and that includes the cost of the car. The common racer doesn't spend \$400,000 on a car or \$35,000 on a bike.

The lesson is to not expect too much from the big networks and it's too bad that all those hours of footage couldn't be used by an independent to create a meaningful show.

If you have someone at the Discovery channel with a sympathetic ear, you might forward our collective feelings on this show. It has sent a ripple thru a number of different groups with whom I regularly correspond."

Diversity is the golden rule with land speed racing, there is something for every level of racer, in the classes at the Bonneville Salt Flats one discovers the American Wild West is alive and thunder-

ing under the hoods and in the frames of a dazzling array of handcrafted speed machinery not seen on such a scale anywhere else in the world.

So I was just as puzzled as Dr. Meyers why the editors deviated from Discovery's youthful storyline to make such a fuss over senior citizen George Poteet and his Blowfish.

Understand that I truly admire and applaud what George has brought to the sport, especially with partner Ron Main, first with Ecofire and now Speed Demon, but these two are NOT your typical land speed racers. On all levels they are the exception, not the rule.

Most every land speed racer comes to the sport with only modest means, plenty of help from friends and an almost unquenchable desire to confront the myriad of challenges thrown down in the path for speed.

"I felt let down after viewing," said SCTA Champion Dave Brant, builder and co-owner of the BWS streamliner, "What I viewed was "big buck" racing and far too many reviews of crashing and drama. There was obviously a lot of effort put in to this piece and it is too bad the editing was not up to the task. I was expecting to view an hour of what Bonneville is...competition, friendship, personal achievement, helping a fellow racer."

Complaints also came in on the misleading voice track about Ohio State University's hydrogen-powered Buckeye Bullet that said the team was banned from the pits because it was too dangerous to run.

This illustrates perfectly why I wanted in on the post production editing. Nonsense like this would have been cut. First off, the SCTA/BNI does not allow unsafe vehicles to run. Second, the Buckeye Bullet had passed all its technical inspections.

Third, the team chose to pit further away from other racers because they needed five times the normal space and didn't want to be seen as acreage hogs.

Finally, the University of Ohio-sponsored engineering project has faculty oversight, so advancing any nuance about the car being unsafe and dangerous is like saying the school is run by a bunch of fools or slackers. Neither has any traction.

Some felt the focus was too tight, that only following three teams did not showcase the sport properly. Here I am on the other side of the fence, Big Fish Entertainment witnessed the action on the salt and should be able to tell the story as they saw it, but they also had to deliver to Discovery a show that pleased the network



ignore most of the sport's leaders, but the director made the final call about which teams the show would follow at the Bonneville Salt Flats.

On the salt, working with a crew of nearly 20 very talented people, my job shifted to sorting out the production crew requests with the SCTA/BNI officials that included balancing the desire to get good shots with maintaining safety and practical oversight. Each night, I lay down mentally, emotionally and physically exhausted.

When the week was done, close to 100

Rodders Respond
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JUST HAD TO SHARE

Goodguys,

I just wanted to share the cutest photo of my husband and daughter enjoying your goodguys merchandise!



Thanks,
Tracey Howard
Fairborn, Ohio

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honchos. From where I sit, a combination historical traffic cop/ mother hen consultant, anything produced for public consumption ought to be a honest portrayal.

Yes, I was part of the production, but I have since learned a hard lesson about not contributing to the post-production. For all those sour aspects mentioned above, I apologize, and recognize my ignorance of the production process may have contributed to distorted representation.

It is also why I am still very annoyed with director Roger Donaldson for trampling Bob Leppan's stature as the reigning motorcycle world record holder by lying to viewers about Burt Munro's Indian hitting 200MPH.

As I write this, Burt's motorcycle class record is still unbroken, more than 40 years later, but people who bought a ticket to see the World's Fastest Indian – at least every single one I've spoken to -- didn't know that amazing fact. With Donaldson the shame should run deeper – he knew Burt personally.

There were plenty of land speeders who loved the Discovery show and were delighted that the sport was highlighted in prime time. However, let me be clear, my allegiance is to the sport, its people and the effervescent spirit that has carried it forward with humble grandeur and quiet, unsponsored dignity for the past 80 years.

Am I alone in thinking that media folks who herald the activities and achievements of LSR should show respect for the fastest, cleverest and hardest working speedsters on earth? You tell me.

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.

Good News
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God still has a plan and a purpose for each life. As He has that greater purpose in mind for each person, the beginning of seeing those results can be seen as a person follows the words found in the book of James 4:8 that if we will "Draw near to God, He will draw near to you." And for anyone who has, may I now ask a question? Has God ever failed you? While He may have not shown up the moment we thought best, He's always been right on time...every time! Wrong choices can be reversed!

Are you interested in either sending your son/grandson, age 16 – 19 to a CRA Hot Rod Camp in '09? Perhaps you would consider sponsoring a young guy? Call CRA for more info: CRA, PO Box 309, Valley Springs, CA 95252; 209-786-0524; cra@intgerity.com.



Goodguys Orange Co. Get-Together
Gazette Pick – cont'd from Pg. 111

TECH INFO

Owner: Mark Wetterau
Laguna Nigel, CA

Year: 1971

Make: Plymouth 'Cuda

Engine:

Aluminum 540ci Hemi, dual 650cfm Holley carbs, Edelbrock "bug eye" air cleaners, Vintage Air, MSD ignition, custom headers, Basanni exhaust.

Drivetrain:

Bowler-prepped 727, Gear Vendors Overdrive, Winters quickchange rear.

Chassis:

Custom tubular K-member with engine plate, Edelbrock V coilovers, custom A-arms, four-link rear suspension, drilled and slotted rotors, Wilwood six and four piston calipers.

Wheels/Tires:

One-off GFG 20x8 and 20x12 billet wheels, Toyo 255/40/20 and 315/35/20's.

Body:

1971 Plymouth Cuda. Shaved door handles, shaker hood, custom grille, rear valence and taillight panel, shaved bumpers, custom clear turn signals, filled and smoothed firewall and inner fenders, custom-mixed red paint, Hemi decal.

Interior:

Black leather upholstery with red stitching, Cobra seats, painted white-faced gauges, B&M shifter, carbon fiber dash panel, carbon fiber rear package tray, custom console, power windows, Kenwood touch screen audio system, FR leather-wrapped aluminum steering wheel.



Goodguys West Coast Custom of the
Year – cont'd from Pg. 145

TECH INFO

Owner: Ted Stevens

Year: 1940

Make: Mercury Coupe

Engine:

Ford Flattie with Offenhauser heads, three Stromberg carbs, electronic ignition, Red's headers, '40 Merc trans, column shifter.

Drivetrain:

TH400 transmission

Chassis:

Stock frame, MII IFS, Ford 9" rear with leaf springs, R&P steering, drum and disc brakes.

Wheels/Tires:

Coker wide whites with steelies and '49 Cadillac hubcaps.

Body:

1940 Mercury Coupe. Chopped top, (5" front, 7" rear), molded fenders, fender skirts, Candy Brandywine paint, spot lights, taillights in over riders, shaved handles and trim, side window frames made in brass.

Interior:

Sid Chavers upholstery, stock seat, chromed dashboard, factory gauges, custom clear red steering wheel.



Goodguys All American Get-Together
Gazette Pick – cont'd from Pg. 197

TECH INFO

Owner: Tom Pagano
Rancho Cordova, CA

Year: 1953

Make: Ford F100

Engine:

360ci Ford FE with tri-power, Mallory dual point ignition, polished C6 trans, handmade four-tube headers and 4" exhaust, Gennie shifter.

Chassis:

Stock frame, 1965 twin-beam axle, dropped 4", custom crossmember, chromed leafsprings with reversed eyes, Torino manual steering box, Ford drum brakes, Ford 9" rear.

Wheels/Tires:

1949 Merc wheels and caps with Coker G-78 and J-78 bias plies.

Body:

1953 Ford F100. Chopped 4", front extended 2", pinched fenders, louvered and side-tilting hood, '58 Chevy taillights in roll pan, canted '58 Lincoln headlights, upside down '55 Chevy truck grille, pearl White paint.

Interior:

Custom dash with 1965 T-bird cluster, floating '59 Olds steering wheel, '74 Monte Carlo swivel seats, Howdy Leadbetter upholstery, Plexiglas firewall.

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THEM IN THE GAZETTE!



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