



# Fuel For Thought

Landspeed Louise

## The Mean Green Steaming Machine

The steam-powered racecar I knew at the Lymington workshop in the south of England several years ago bore little resemblance to the one I saw coated with the butterscotch talcum powder dust. The willowy flyer had morphed into a six-ton bomber.

After nearly a decade of work, Charles Burnett III and his British Steam

Car Challenge reached a top speed of 159MPH and set four damned hard-earned new world (provisional at this writing) and couple national records out on the sweltering Muroc Dry Lakes at Edwards Air Force Base in southern California this past August.

The intense weather was matched with sensory-laden stress that touched

gasoline and diesel engine advances.

There isn't enough space to get into the rigors of developing a steam turbine. Trust me that it was exhaustive, extensive and grueling for Jerry Bliss who might the equivalent to a constipated social piranha, but is an astonishingly fine and dedicated engineer.

"It was extremely joyful that we had clearly passed the 145MPH several times," noted Burnett referring to the Barber Steamin' Demon record, "If we had slower gearing, the speeds would have had been better because we were still accelerating at the end of timed miles."

A personal historical milestone was also achieved by development driver Don Wales, the grandson of Sir Malcolm and nephew of Donald Campbell, who became what I believe to be, the first third-generation record-setter in the sport when Burnett gave up his seat to Wales on the last day.

"I was hoping we could run again," said a happy and humble Wales who had worn a St. Christopher medal from his mother, a gift she had first given to her father for his record runs, "But Charles had to leave."

Wales added that the record was unique because nothing broke on Burnett's record runs and then the team removed some inhibiting controls and the boilers behaved like they were in church.

"Two boilers had the propensity to run away with themselves, to overheat," observed the mean green steaming machine's second driver, "We lost several boilers while here. The car almost beat us into submission."

However, on the return run, possibly the last run the car would ever make, Wales got out of the throttle early with 30 seconds of gas still in the tanks figuring he was through the measured mile and he could give the photographers a parachute shot.

A reasonable explanation, but I think gramps Sir Mac would have slapped him upside his helmet because the car's top speed certainly could have been somewhere north of 160MPH if he had kept his foot in it until the car was out of fuel.

"I felt it was appropriate for him to take one of the records," explained Burnett who will keep the kilo record and let Wales hold the mile record, "He earned the right to come out of this with something."

Mostly unknown to the outside world is the invaluable team input of Frank Swanston who died from a vicious, aggressive cancer not long after uncovering some overly restrictive architecture

and redirecting the project onto what proved to be the proper course. In short, even from the grave he saved the day.

"Frank made a huge contribution," Burnett said with earnest belief, "He had such a broad understanding of so many systems that he was able to assess that we were headed in wrong direction and brought us back to steam basics. He then found very specialized, capable people that put us on the path forward."

Matt Candy and Lynne Angel deserve a special mention for a job well-done. After the death of Frank Swanston, these two helped the team find its way forward with agility and patience.

Out on the playa the team included Crew Chiefs Clive Hawkins, Nick Bass and Wilbur Day who ran the computer system, were in charge of the launch and supervising five crewmen.

The "right-hand" men were Richard Channell and Chris Yates who were to look after the driver and checking the equipment and assisted with various other car duties as needed.

Electrical chores were taken care of by Mike Horne and Chris Lack. Horne was also responsible for the composite bodywork. The "Oilers" were Mark Blackwell and Dave Crabtree. Matthew Warr and Adam Tye saw to the racecar radios and team communication systems.

The "Plug-in" men, Stuart Bailey, Nigel Leppard and Ben May hooked up various umbilical cords and monitored the car system rigs for water, gas and air. Chief Gofer duties were proudly discharged by Chris Piercy. The entire crew was beholden to Chief Sandwich Technician Rob Gray.

And get this: because the British Motor Sports Association that controls racing licenses in the UK did not recognize Burnett's Bonneville runs as "proper racing" and refused him a license. Burnett easily obtained a SCCA license, so now all the British steam car records will be recorded as American.

Burnett's no ninny behind the wheel or at the helm. He earned "world's fastest offshore outboard" honors at 137MPH with Vulture Ventures in the late '90s.

"I have found that it costs more to get a land speed record than it does to get a water speed record," confessed Burnett, "If a sponsor came forward, the car might run again, there certainly is potential left; I think we could get to 175MPH with different gears, tires and propane mix."

Does Burnett have any regrets? "Given the results," he quickly told me as he was packing for a trip to South



every member of the team in varying degrees right up until the eleventh hour as parts broke, systems shut-down, or refused to operate daily. The screaming kettle was one of the most temperamental racing machines I've ever known.

I wondered if owner/driver Charles Burnett III, who underwrote the technological experiment despite some very dark days, was more happy or relieved.

"Happiness and relief in equal measure," he said laughing freely, "The most stressful part of my life, besides moments with family, was the third day from the end, the car was going slower, slower and slower. When do you quit, or draw the line between stupidity and tenacity? I was lucky I didn't have to make that decision. I am glad it's over, I don't want to face those decisions again."

Where congratulations were in order, instead, some absurd criticism flew their way, including, "It was most unsporting to go after the oldest record on the books." What do you say to something like that? As if a record is some sacrosanct icon that none dare defy.

The car didn't pump the record high enough for others after a century. If the Stanley Brothers had modern safety items on their car the speed might not have reached 127MPH.

And let's face it, while there is a vibrant group of steam enthusiasts merrily tinkering about around the world, all of them together amount to a scant pile of serious R&D work in the area of mobile steam power plants when compared to

## Lowdown Continued from Page 8

at the window to watch the rain. As I ate I noticed that only a few cars were leaving and that lots of people were still walking around or huddled together under their pop-up canopies. Surprisingly, this didn't change the entire time I ate. I figured I'd give it a little while longer and everyone would start clearing out. They didn't!

So then it hit me - why am I sitting in here when all these people are out there enjoying themselves in spite of the weather? I decided to hit the swap meet. Of course it was packed because it was inside. Then I headed to the car corral - also packed. Well, why not check out the vendor building. To say it was packed would be an understatement.

I began to realize that very few people had left and that everyone had decided to make the best of the day, damn the weather. I was impressed! So impressed and inspired that I started trekking from pop-up to pop-up just to say "thank you" to these hardcore hot rodders who were just hanging out swapping stories and having a great time. They could have left, but why? Their friends and 6000 cool cars were right there. So what if it was raining. Once they changed modes, no one seemed to care about the weather.

My point? Life is what you make of it, and we hot rodders choose to do things that we enjoy, so just decide to enjoy next time the rain tries to tell you otherwise! **GF**

## Rodders Respond Continued from Page 10

Thanks again!

Clay  
Clayton Machine Works, Inc.  
Huntsville, AL

**WOW! Now that's an inspiring story. We're all glad you and your son are safe, and congratulations on the award. K!**

KIRK!,

I have been a member for many years and have never complained until now. I had a really long letter written voicing my sadness over the picture and caption on page 142 of the August 2009 issue, that the coolest camaro pick went to and I quote "A 2010 Camaro that was straight off-the-showroom-floor." Then I figured it out. The Goodguys and, of course, all the other big clubs become about the money not about the cars.

So instead of driving my all steel '37 Ford to your shows, I'll just drive my wife's 2008 "off the showroom floor" Ford Fusion. If it worked for the 2010 camaro, maybe it will work for me, and then hundreds of other dedicated street rodders can leave their cool cars home and drive their off the showroom floor junk.

It breaks my heart that a 2010 Cama-

ro would be picked instead of one like Jerry's on page 115 and he and every other Camaro owner should be mad as hell. I don't care to see 2010 anything at a car show or in a magazine and if I did want to see one I would go to a dealer or a Mall. Am I just narrow minded, or are there others who feel the same way.

Pops  
Via email

**Pops, thanks for the letter. First of all, the event in the coverage was a Get-Together where all years of American made or powered cars and trucks are welcome and encouraged. At these events a number of our awards are geared toward newer cars and at the time that was the first 2010 Camaro that most everyone in attendance had seen in person and it drew a crowd all weekend. In fact, it received a round of applause as it drove through the awards ceremony.**

**I don't think you're narrow minded, just uninformed as to the type of event being shown. Again, thanks for the input. K! **GF****

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Africa, "No, not one. We had a great team that supported each other and in end gave me a great gift."

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). **GF**

## STEAM CAR PROVISIONAL RECORDS

**August 25th**  
Mile: 139.843 MPH  
KILO: 140.149

**August 26th**  
Mile: 148.166MPH  
Kilo: 148.308MPH

## Good Tips Continued from Page 196

which over time converts to an acid that rusts your brake parts. It also causes a major reduction in the boiling point of the fluid. When normal driving puts heat into the fluid, the expanding fluid can cause trouble. If your brakes are getting higher and harder as you drive, try flushing the system with alcohol and rebleeding with all new fluid. That's assuming you've already checked for push rod play, proper connections, and valving as mentioned above.

Be sure to have a pedal that has a

return action. Power boosters will already do this, but a manual pedal assembly often lacks it. The pedal can bleed fluid past the internal piston, causing loss of brakes. A return spring prevents that and gives you a second shot. Long springs are available at the parts houses, but we like to put a large fender washer and a spring over the pushrod itself as a return system. The parts can be found at any decent hardware store, and will serve to keep contaminants out of the master cylinder as well.

Another way you can lose your brakes is if the caliper interferes with the suspension at full lock in a turn. If there is enough contact, the caliper gets cocked in its bracket, causing the pads to retract. Your first pedal pump merely takes up that clearance, and you can't stop (thank goodness you added that return spring, huh!). You will need to limit steering travel or change the caliper to one with a different shape to fix this. Excessive rotor run out due to warped rotors can cause this also. We've also seen it when a one-off disc conversion was done by mounting a rotor on an original hub with ball bearings. The ball bearings do not control the rotor as well as tapered bearings, thus causing the pads to be "batted" back.

These obscure little problems can become big ones when you have no brakes -especially when avoiding a goof-ball driver in front of you. Take the time this winter to solve them so you'll be ready for travel to the first Goodguys deal this Spring! **GF**

## Good News Continued from Page 214

nearby mining company, which was slowly, but effectively, damaging the building with their blasts. It seems that beneath the foundation there were small shifts and changes taking place in the soil, which caused the whole foundation to crack. It was not something you could see or feel from the surface, but none-the-less, it was weakening the building. Ultimately it had to be demolished. Not something uncommon to many people's life choices.

I think we'd all agree that certain words from Jimmy Hoffa strongly indicate he didn't always make the right choices. He is reported as saying, "I have a lot of faults, but being wrong isn't one of them!" Today's not too late for us to ask ourselves the hard question - am I making right choices - not only in my choice of cars, but in life in general? It's the "Golden Age of Advertising!" Perhaps a good "ad" of caution would be from the book of Job 34: 4, "Let us choose that which is right; let us know among ourselves what is good."

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, customs, and some of your friends is available by writing (\$10.00+postage) CRA, PO Box 309, Valley Springs, CA 95252. (209) 786-0524; [cra@integrity.com](mailto:cra@integrity.com). [www.christianrodders-racers.org](http://www.christianrodders-racers.org) **GF**



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