



Four By Four On A Road Less Traveled

It is no secret to anyone involved with, or interested in, land speed racing, that precious little attention is paid to the sport by the mainstream media. Even automotive based media outlets are economical with the pages, shows and segments devoted to the world's fastest cars, trucks and motorcycles.

So I was pleasantly struck when I realized I had four "new" books sitting on my desk connected to the grand pursuit of speed deeds. You can buy two of the four right now, another wrapped up the manuscript just before I blasted off for Speedweek and has an early 2011 publication date. The final one is my new research adventure into the fastest American designed and built car – The Blue Flame.

GREEN BANANAS

When I met driver Pat Rummerfield out on the Bonneville Salt Flats, he was just another skinny racer with a flat butt. His streamliner, on the other hand, was powered by more than 6,000 flash light batteries. Got my attention, it did. White Lightning, owned by Ed Dempsey, ripped across the flats setting a number of national and international records.

I was drawn to Rummerfield by his unassuming attitude; he radiated obvious awe and wonder that is usually only found in children. "How did he manage to hang onto those qualities well into adulthood," I thought to myself. When he told me I had to find a place to sit down from the shock. Pat is the ONLY known recovered quadriplegic in the world and his "comeback" is simply astonishing.

Back in 2000 he asked me to author his life story, but I was crazy busy with promoting my Bonneville history book and helping Don Vesco nab the world wheel-driven record. Pat found others to help, but the manuscript never got to a comfortable place with him and he called me again, this time to edit the book. I was honored to sign on as Editor and Designer.

About ten minutes before starting this column, I finished the final edit on the manuscript and tell you that if you read this book, entitled "Green Bananas" it will strip your gears. Rummerfield lays bare his life story that literally went end-over-end when he and a buddy got liquored up one night shortly after his 21st birthday then took a high-speed joy ride in his 1963 split window Corvette.

A violent, spectacular crash broke, ripped, and slashed almost his entire body, knocking out 4 cervical vertebrae and more than 70 percent of his spinal cord in the process. Forget walking again,

the doctors at two hospitals all agreed on one thing: he had 72 hours to live. Yeah, well, Rummerfield has the damndest stubborn streak you will ever find and went on to spend 17 years proving doctors dead wrong.

What he did and how he did it, and still does it, will have you shaking your head in disbelief. The story includes plenty of racecars, the Hawaiian Ironman triathlon, hikes across the Gobi Desert and Antarctica and a psycho first wife.

He knew he was destined for high-speed cars when the older kids at the orphanage were unable to flip him out of the little red wagon they pushed with the bully intent of wrecking him in the schoolyard. The "runt of his mother's litter" proved those kids wrong too.

If you want to know more about this astounding man, or put dibs on a copy of his book, log onto: <http://rummerfield.homestead.com>.



THROTTLE

When speed was young and full of undiscovered zeniths, back in 1941, a fellow named Jack Peters conceived and published Throttle, a simple black and white magazine, rarely more than 12 pages in length that sold for 10 cents a copy.

Considered the earliest known performance documentation, Throttle is the "Rosetta Stone" of speedsters; it was the first to offer printed reports, photos and ads to the public before readers knew they were hot rodders. Only published for one full year, Peter's in-depth reporting came to an abrupt halt when the Japanese carried out their sneak attack on Pearl Harbor and the hot rodders went off to war.

Among the pages you'll find many familiar names, but attached to young faces when everything was still possible and probable, every one was possessed of a effervescent fervor to build and drive a speed machine.

Long out of print, few copies

remained in private hands and Thom Taylor got the wild idea to gather together a full set, partner up with The Rodder's Journal crowd and republish the collection in one book.

The handsome 185 page black hard-bound book is protected by a dust jacket that emulates the March 1941 Throttle cover. Taylor, a credit to curiosity satisfied, also solved the mystery of why Throttle never returned after WWII. I was particularly pleased to see an extensive index included that will surely be appreciated by all readers. There is no ISBN number for the book, copies for your personal trip into yesterday may be ordered through: www.rodgersjournal.com.

BLUEBIRD CN7 - The Inside Story Of Donald Campbell's Last Land Speed Record Car

Donald Stevens
ISBN 978-1-84584-280-2
Veloce Publishing, Distributed by Motorbooks International

This is a story about the car, that million dollar baby that took Donald Campbell seven years to build in an effort to keep the family speed record-setting legacy alive and well. Originally called the Campbell Norris 7, Campbell knocked Ken and Lew Norris out of the limelight when he told the press the car was only two letters and a numeral.

Stevens, project coordinator for the CN7, was the first employee hired by the Norris brothers in 1958, takes the opportunity to correct the snub and gives readers an in-depth look at the design, build and running of the exquisite speed machine.

Don't go buying this book thinking you're going to get a historical narrative on Donald or dear ol' dad Malcolm, the book is light in that respect, but if you clamor for the technical side of land speed racing, this book is for you.

For instance, there is little specifically written about Campbell's spectacular crash on the Bonneville Salt Flats, yet Stevens 38-page report that analyzes what happened is reproduced in its entirety so the reader can draw their own conclusions about why Campbell severely wrinkled up his speed toy. Did you know Mickey Thompson tried in vain to cancel the ill-fated run? Stevens also reveals the many friction points surrounding the Norris Brothers, Leo Villa, Campbell and others on the team. Not so much an airing of "dirty laundry", but more a

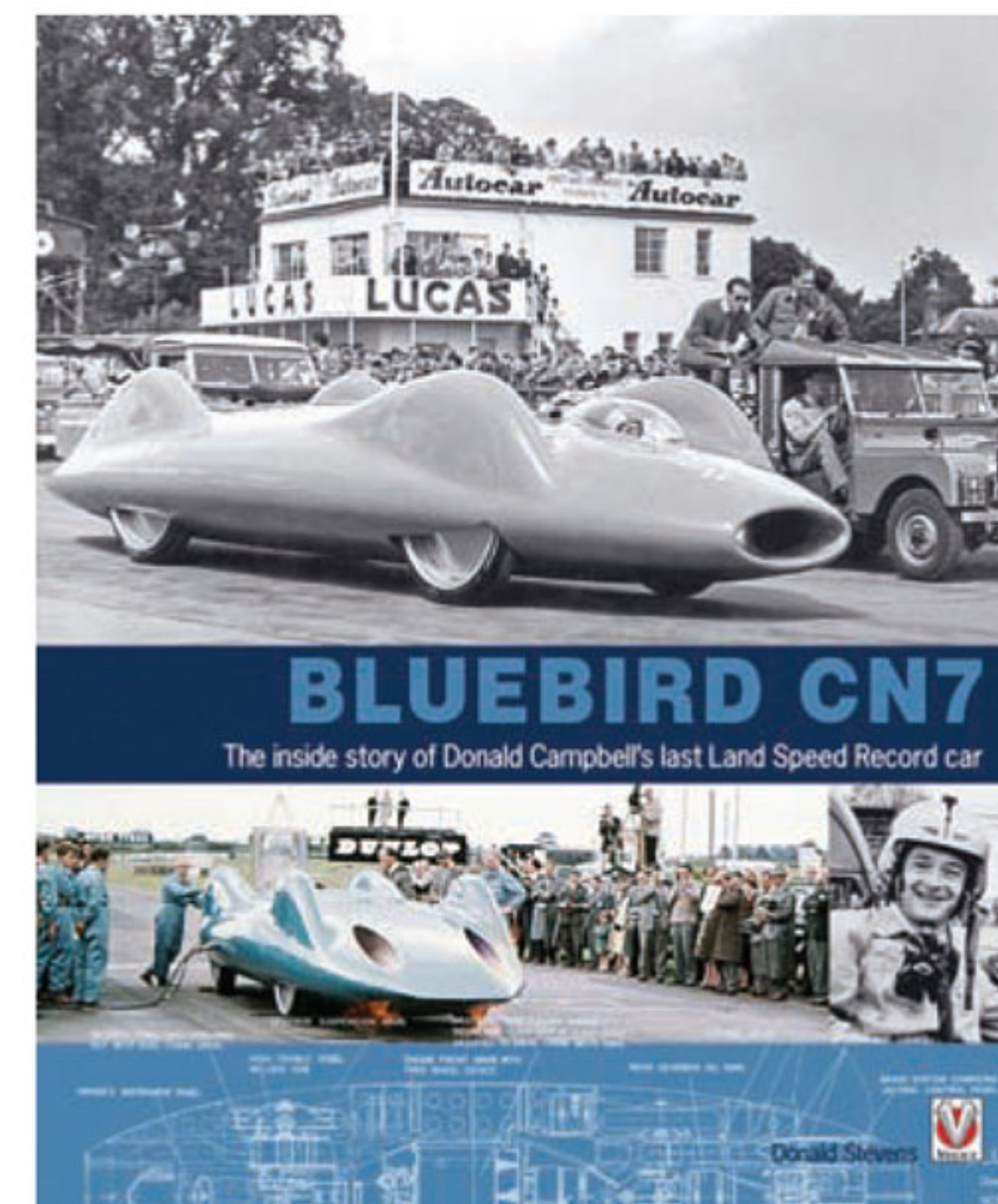
characterization of the social aspects that make the players human, not heroes.

While in Australia, the gas turbine-powered CN7 set the fastest wheel-driven vehicle record in 1964 and held the record until America's Don Vesco claimed the title in 2001 with an outstanding pair of 458MPH runs on Bonneville driving the Turbinator. And just like Bluebird, the untimely death of its driver, meant the car never realized its full potential -- somewhere north of 500MPH.

There are revealing photos, detailed illustrations, graphs and diagrams, many from the author's collection. The Appendices include the car's weight analysis, sponsor list and reprints of marketing materials from CIBA crowing about its honeycomb material and Dunlop, shining up its rubber wares.

There is even talk that CN8 would be a rocket car and the plans went as far as mockup, but I am sure the great success of America's Blue Flame weighed heavy on decisions to move forward, if another driver could be persuaded to drive for the record.

THE BLUE FLAME



Working with the quiet genius rocket designer and builder Ray Dausman and car builder extraordinaire Pete Farnsworth, I am astonished at what the pair squirreled away for the past 40 years. Original drawings, thousands of photos, correspondence, press clippings, The Blue Flame rocket car was a phenomenal mix of boyhood bravado and grown-up American "can do" implementation sprinkled with leaps of faith and rugged, "hang-ten" science. I began in-person and telephone interviews in May with the original team members. They have vivid memories.

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It is really three books in one. The technical aspects are a thing of wonder as the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago threw its best and brightest headlong into the design of the car. Did you know the car was built to exceed Mach one back in 1970? If the sponsors hadn't been short-sighted no one would know who Andy Green was today.

It is also a tale of the early days of business and industry figuring out how to partner with motorsports. The number of groups, organizations, firms and association involved with making the project a reality is as staggering as it is confounding.

Of course, the third and most engaging is the human element, the hopes, dreams, and private consternations of those who fabricated and then operated the rocket-powered streamliner cinched done to only 58,000HP. Although driver Gary Gabelich died more than 25 years ago, memories of my friend are vivid and many of his family and friends are at the ready to fill-in any blanks.

I am filled with a effervescent sense of the unknown, hoping to gather all the pieces together and bring forward a book that will finally honor the unwavering dedication of so many for so long who did so very much for this country four decades ago.

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. The publisher is sold out, but Noeth has less than 50 copies left, including a limited number of limited autographed editions. For more details and to order, go to: www.landspeedproductions.biz. It has been a GREAT run!