



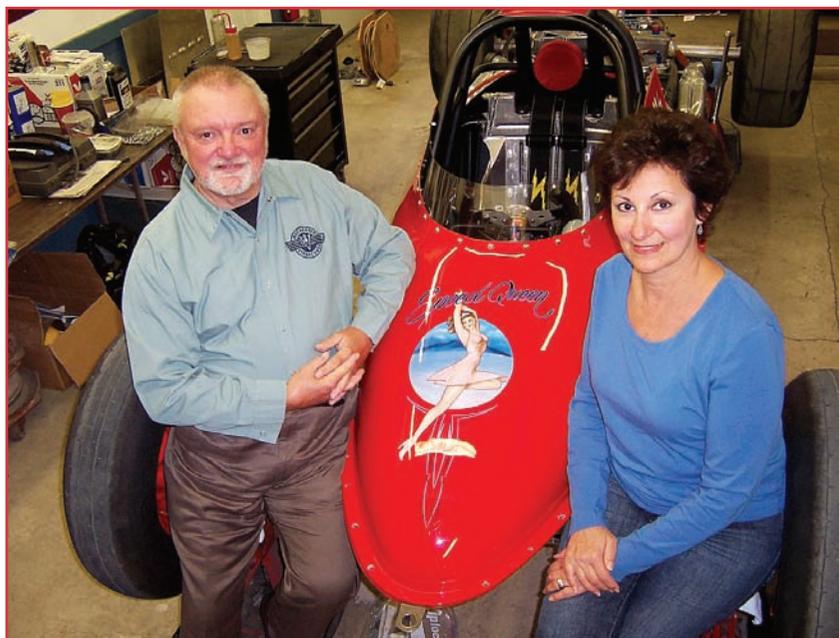
Fuel For Thought

Landspeed Louise

Speed Queen; A Crowning Achievement of Eternal Youth

Some people manage to live their lives in “Puer eternus,” or eternal youth. Ever wonder if you had it in you? Would you have the courage? That’s right, courage. Tripping the life fantastic isn’t easy, it takes work. It’s not for sale in some shop, or available at discount through the internet. Ron Richardson figured out that living “young at heart” was simply a matter of prioritization.

To Richardson, a belly tank lakester is the spiritual embodiment of hot rodding. The LSR quest began in 2002, involved 47 people, including a psychiatrist and very patient, loving wife referred to as, “Miss Judy.” “It’s a good thing my wife doesn’t ask me how much this all costs,” Richardson chuckled nervously, “I was in finance, but with this car I stopped counting about two years ago.”



John Birosh designs the Speed Queen belly tank

Long before Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson ever shared their “Bucket List” with audiences, 55 year-old Richardson punched through a variety of medical problems giving him mortal clarity and he wasted no time writing down what he wanted to accomplish in the time remaining. “It was a short list,” said Richardson, now 64, “I want to go more than 200MPH at the four land speed venues – Bonneville, El Mirage, Maxton and the Texas Mile. I also want to see the Monte Carlo Grand Prix in person and make a run up that Lord’s hill during the Goodwood Festival of Speed.”

Richardson, “Without the helmet on I sat down and instantly couldn’t get out of the car fast enough.”

That feeling of dread happened again and again. However, like any good racer, the phobia was just another problem to fix. Hypnotized on the first visit, Richardson had a few more tune-ups, ending the “repair” sessions lying on the proverbial couch in his fire suit and helmet.

World Record Holder Al Teague suffered the same anxiety driving the Spirit of 76 lakester turned streamliner and I shared this with Richardson. Jane Teague told me Al’s “fix” was to not close the can-

opy until moments before his launch off the starting line. Once underway, he was far too busy driving to be disconcerted. “I was a drag racer in the ‘60s who spent his book money on parts while in college,” confessed Richardson, “At Grad school I took up SCCA racing that lasted until the mid ‘70s when the street rod bug bit. That was 30 street rods and one wife ago.”

I’ve never met Richardson, or seen the car in-person. Happy little email messages imbued with hope, promise and a touch of mischief started showing up with regularity months ago. The progress caught my eye, it did, and I thought his speed expedition executed with such beauty and technical taste was worth sharing.

“Alex Xydias was my inspiration and racer Jack Kelly who began as my mentor became a good friend,” beamed Richardson, “Joe Timney has provided guidance and counseling; he’s been involved since day one. His rules ‘clarification’ and general influence resulted in the car breezing through tech at both events attended.”

Chassis engineering and construction rested in the hands of John Birosh who called for a chromoly chassis, torsion bars at each corner, cantilever shocks, rack & pinion steering and four-wheel disc brakes among other details under the skin the very non-traditional belly tank! Bob Hemenway assisted in the fabrication.

If you ever meet Richardson, ask him why Mark Knapp put three different roll cages on the car. Tony Palozzi strung all the wiring. Brian “The Brush” Briskie stepped up to do the color selection, graphic design, air brush nose art, pin stripping.

As it has been for decades, one guy provides the car, the other guy and long-time pal Steve Walczak, provides the engine. Speed Queen’s is a 418CID small block Chevy running with a 14:1 compression ratio, is Hilborn injected and drinks Methanol.

The car travels to speed meets in Ken Doucette’s trailer. Also a Birosh employee; he opened his home shop to the car two years ago and has since “adopted” the project. Thank him for the slick paint and bodywork.

Phil Panos got to be crew chief because when the project started he was the only person Richardson knew who had ever been to Bonneville.

Doubtless, Miss Judy is the key component to Richardson’s racing program, as she is “an extremely supportive wife and partner with extraordinary patience.” Richardson did a bit more than just project design and management; he boasts specialties of cajoling and begging, craft-

ing the plumbing and cabling while simultaneously becoming best buddies with his credit card.

Richardson, a member of the Rochester Street Rods car club for nearly four decades, also worked in the 80’s with Goodguys’ own Gary Meadors, then the NSRA event director, to produce driving events and contests.

Noteworthy is that Richardson’s project found traction during a Goodguys event at Lowes Motor Speedway. He got wind of someone in North Carolina who had bought and sold Jack Kelly’s molds before ending up in Maryland owned by an old acquaintance of his, Rich Venza.

Richardson had a body by 2003, a year after he started looking. The chassis gobbled up another year and the engine showed up in 2005.

The first test runs were at a local drag strip for a shake down in September of 2007 followed by his driving debut at Maxton later that year where he worked his way up to B license clocking 189, 186 and 193MPH to set a new class record.

Getting to know Speed Queen, he tried different combinations of launch, shift point and converter lock-up. “The lakester ran great and handled well,” he noted of the 2,000 pound car, “It’s a bit “darty” near the top end but some ballast will help settle it into the track.

My quest now brings with it even more respect for those that have surpassed the 200mph mark; I never guessed it would be this much of a challenge!” As I entered the speed trap, I literally had my head “in the car” searching for the parachute release handle..., DEFINITELY a distraction that must have taken away momentum. A new handle will be fitted before the car runs again.”

Using the washing machine brand name “Speed Queen” for a car project was the brainchild of another car buddy, but Richardson stole the idea although he refers to his car as “Speed Queen II.” “I have always appreciated the pin-up art of Alberto Vargas,” explained Richardson who decided on the June 1946 ‘Sweet Innocence’ in the Esquire magazine.”

A salt virgin, Richardson and his New York contingent are the epitome of amateur land speed racing and a grand expression of the American “can-do” spirit. I wish him the very best time trials.

Romans 1010 – The Witness Project

A vicious car wreck made sure Jeff Davenport would never get to race the sparkling flamed red 1946 Crosley on the flats. His father, Gerald, made sure his



late son's dreams stayed alive by building and driving the J/PRO land speed car to a national record powered by a .75 liter engine.

Crosleys were the first cars to have disc brakes and could get 50 miles per gallon. Davenport also opened the "World's Largest Crosley Dealership" in Paducah, Kentucky to further honor the memory of his son's dreams. The facility is more museum than retail hub.

His second car, dubbed "Romans 1010, the Witness Project," started in 2006. Mark McManus, Brad Starks, Daniel Fleming and Dave Bamber are the build

team and Davenport thanks God "for allowing me to have these four men as my friends."

A first, I think is Full Gospel Tabernacle pastor, the Reverend Larry Joe Hall at Davenport's local church, who wrote and performed a catchy country ballad about the little red car. You can screen it at www.crosley1010.com.

The Bible passage refers to heart-felt faith manifested in words spoken for salvation. Davenport's spiritual core reminds me of LSR '40s great Ab Jenkins who made no bones about his religious convictions.

Romans 1010 was race ready in March this year making inaugural runs at the ECTA Maxton event. With more than two dozen appearance/racing dates for the car including several Goodguys events and in addition to LSR record attempts, the little red car has a busy first year.

Last Call for Bonneville History Book

If you read this column with any regularity, you'll note the thumbnail bio at the end talks about my history book on the Bonneville Salt Flats. Published waaaaaay back in 1999, it stayed in print far longer than I ever imagined.

Now, the publisher tells me the party is over. When the current inventory is gone MBI will not reprint the book. If you have any fleeting thought of owning a copy, giving one to a crewmember, or other special someone, don't delay much longer.

Nancy and Jon Wennerberg, who recently purchased the www.landracing.com

website, had a great idea that you might consider for your hometown. The much admired land speed racing couple bought a couple books donating both to their local library – their way to ensure the story of land speed racing will be available to curious kids of all ages.

Why two books? One copy would be for the circulation shelves and the other I autographed to the library and it will be kept in the reference section. It is a small, but solid way to raise the consciousness about the sport.

I've long believed the Bonneville story ought to be part of a curriculum on American culture, so putting the books into public and university libraries might catch some teacher or professor's eye someday. It is a lovely way to go fishing for future fans. **GG**

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 printing. For more details and to order, go to: www.land-speedproductions.biz.



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