

Fuel For Thought

with "Landspeed Louise" Ann Noeth

The Lore of More, a Speedweek Lament

Photos by: Cris Shearer and Ron Christensen

"We could have done more if we had more to work with," explained Top Speed of the Meet (383 MPH) driver Mike Nish in a calm debriefing fashion, "With conditions as they were, we did the best we could with what we had. We needed more horsepower, or more race track."

What is this more he's talking about? If they had more what were they going to do with it? When talking to a land speed racer it always requires using the ubiquitous more to beat the blue blister daylight out of an existing land speed record. With Nish Motorsports, it is the quest to find "the Holy Grail" of land speed racing: The 409 MPH Goldenrod record set in 1965, so old it is venerated by racers. Most can only be brazen about toppling the mark while dreaming with their Nomex driving gloves under their pillow. Few ever learn what it's like hurtling along at four bills.

Al Teague dreamt like that, but kept the dreams to himself for nearly 15 years. In 1991, he finally felt what Bob Summers felt as the tachometer pulled itself up and over the arc reaching a speed plateau that few had ever attained. Teague's more ran out at 438MPH. But Teague had help; he had a supercharger atop the "Spirit of 76"



Here's a happy guy . . . , driver Mike Nish just discovered he set Top Time of the Meet by unreeling a 383MPH pass. Below left the Nish Motorsports poses up for a team shot. Below right, more than the team's pretty face and purse, patriarch Terry Nish takes care of packing the parachutes himself.

streamliner. Tom Buckland also knows about more, but he must wait until there is more smooth, hard salt before he once again winds up the gleaming dreamsicle orange 411 machine. Then you've got the late Don Vesco who found lots more in a turbine engine. Vesco sailed into the FIA World Wheel-Driven Record Land Speed Record books with a pair of practically identical, back-to-back 458MPH runs. Sadly TEAMVesco lost Don to prostate cancer and his dream for more, as in more than 500MPH died with him.

The trouble is, there is never ever enough more. Not for these boys and girls (speedsters are ageless and genderless) who stealthily seek speed in all the flat places with all the fast pieces they can find, make, borrow and break. No matter how fast, no matter how often, there will always be someone looking for more to blast past the speed limit mark of the one who came before.

This is the carrot that taunts and torments Terry Nish. His more has been dangling ever so slightly out of reach for such a long, long time. According to son Mike, whom I spoke with while working on the car in his Salt Lake shop, "Dad wants to drive in October at the World Finals, this is his puppy, so whatever he wants." By the time you read this it will all be over, the LSR 2004 season finished and Bonneville will be covered over in yet another healing layer of briny water. Terry and crew will have swapped out the 558 CID engine for the 675 CID



After finally putting together a pair of plus 300MPH rides, Sam Wheeler and his familiar green EZ-HOOK streamliner surpassed the Easyriders record time that Dave Campos set a decade ago at 322MPH. After more than a decade of effort, Sam now owns World's Fastest BNI Bike Record with a 334MPH average with his fastest recorded one-way speed of 338.269 MPH.

beast that has 1,000 HP more and hopefully with the right mix of more, they will have twice respectfully, honorably demonstrated that it is time for Bob Summers' name to be replaced. It is, after all, the reason the Royal Purple streamliner was built in the first place.

I quizzed Top Time Nish about the 383 MPH ride, and he was gracious enough to offer up a "Lexan-eye view" about the trip to 400MPH. "At Speedweek, we were running "the Mule", the smaller test engine. The car felt really good under power and the ride was just a little bit more intense. On one run, the parachutes didn't deploy, the problem was a combination of air turbulence in the rear and fatigued release springs. As the racing surface degraded and the crosswinds intensified, it required my full attention to keep the car going straight. This run had me more concerned that losing the parachutes. As the car moved around, it not only made me more aware of the speed, but gave me more respect for speed. Running on a straight line is pretty comfortable, but when you run up on some wind, it raises the hair on your neck. You have to stay calm and focus your attention. There was a definite rise in the pucker factor. I was in control almost all of the time, but after I shut-off and had slowed down to 40 MPH, the salt was so slick at the other end that the car spun 180 degrees, it was like crack the whip, and I stopped facing the way I had just come."

It's obvious that Mike Nish possesses both experience and a tremendous knowledge of his speed machine. Anything less and I wouldn't be reporting about such a brilliant display of driving skill.

In the time it took Sam Wheeler to design, build and achieve his motorcycle streamliner speed goals, he raised a pair of kids that have already left home. So you know the guy is in it for the long haul. "That just counts the running time," chuckled the world's fastest two-wheeled rider after setting a new all-time motorcycle record of 334 MPH, "It was Dec '86 when my boss at EZ-Hook, Phelps Wood, asked me if I wanted to build another bike, but we had quite a bit to drink that night so I had to make sure he was serious after we sobered up."

Wheeler drew up plans in 1987, construction started in 1988. Elliot Andrews, the CalTech Director of Engineering at the time, got the EZ HOOK streamliner wind tunnel time as part of a student project in 1989 with four graduate students, concentrating on making the green machine a two-wheeled air slipper. Elliot also helped make the connection with

Kawasaki and later became a crewmember. "We had a han-



Warren Bullis is the 2nd recipient of the SCTA's Bob Higbee Award. Bullis, a long-time volunteer, has served in a variety of capacities over the years and like the perpetual award's namesake, has made land speed racing better for all by unselfishly donating his time.



Dean Johnson's The Spirit of Lake Minnetonka. Son Kurt noted the team established several records since they became involved in LSR – all in excess of 200 MPH – including the F/GS record this year at 221. Unfortunately, he experienced a violent crash that virtually destroyed the car, severely injuring Johnson.

dling problem the first few years due to the metal wheel," said Wheeler, "I think it was lack of lateral control. Dennis Manning donated some rubber Goodyear tires to the project and then Goodyear gave me the last eight Frontrunners, 17-inch 250's left over from a drag racing project." Until last year, Wheeler didn't think record level speeds were possible because he had yet to make a full 5-mile pass under power. This was because the parachute doors that significantly reduce drag, were failing to open fully, so he would shut off early, sometimes a whole mile early to have enough room to stop safely. The door problem got sorted out at Speedweek '03, but then he lost a front tire at the '03 World Finals. "I was getting nervous," Wheeler confessed, "I went 300 lots of times, but that extra 10% wasn't there until I made the full pass where the bike averaged 326mph and 334 out the back door. Then I knew if we had the salt and could make the tires live we'd be all set." One more Wheeler doesn't want is wind. If the crosswinds rise to five miles an hour he won't run. Having made a pass in an eight m.p.h. crosswind that properly scared him; once is enough. This might explain why he is prematurely grey.

So after the qualifying run of 338, the team pulled into impound, pumped up the tire with a little more nitrogen (the inert gas doesn't expand as much or as fast as oxygen, and doesn't eat rubber) and when the volunteers completed their Herculean task of moving the courses after a downpour, Wheeler took off into glory. "Other than a slight crosswind at the timing stand that blew me around a little, the run was uneventful. As



When Shebad Too owner Sam Samson died in a car wreck, his dream of running 200 MPH at Bonneville didn't die with him. Instead 70 plus friends banded together and made it their business to finish Sam's task. Gary Gustafson, one of the many Maine Barons Racing Team, drove the coupe entered as the "Sam Samson Special" 202.390 MPH. Must have put Sam's wings all flutter.

soon as I passed the five mile mark, I hit the chutes because I need three miles to get stopped," said Wheeler reliving the run, "I don't like to use brakes because the rotor gets hot and the body doesn't take heat very well, but I knew the salt was very smooth until the 8.5 mile mark — that's very rare." So smooth was the run that it seemed like a Sunday cruise masquerading as a world speed run. Still, he chunked the tire on the record run which put an end to his Speedweek racing. When we spoke, it still hadn't sunk in that he was now the fastest motorcyclist on the planet. "It took so long to do that it took some of the sparkle off," revealed Wheeler, "I'm way past deadline and way over budget — it cost 10 times what I thought it would be. What kept him going? "If I had quit, I would have failed," he replied easily, "So if I never quit I would never fail."

Now it's time for dispatches from the salt. 2004 Speedweek boasted 374 Entries that included 330 cars and 109 bikes, 65 Class Changes brought the total entries to 437. Despite the long lines and rain, 181 new records were set by 74 motorcycles and 107 automobiles. I couldn't make Speedweek, but because Cris Shearer, Ron Christensen, John Wright, Dave Brant, Gary Hensley and Sue Christophersen kept an eye out, some tasty tales come your way. My sincere thanks to my salty elves!

From Arrow Racing's Gary Hensley: I got the (200mph Club) red hat I've always wanted, and was privileged to have been able to help my friend of 30 plus years — Bob Williams — realize his dream of setting a record at over 200mph with a motorcycle streamliner that he built with his own hands. The #1150 Arrow Williams streamliner set a record in class SG-650 with a 210.728 average on the last day, on the last run. Most of the week had been filled with broken parts, bad batteries, bad adjustments, bad weather and just plain bad thinking. By Thursday evening, with only one day left to qualify, we were as low as low can be. Friday morning this team that I'm so proud to be a part of got up full of enthusiasm and energy. We pushed out to the starting line and setup, made a run of 211, then backed it up about 3 hours later at 209 for a new record of 210.728. We were all dazed.

Goodguys Goodtimes Gazette

What a turn of events.

From John Wright: For 25 years, Sam "TOHRJ" Samson, (The Original Hotrod Junkie) drove "Shebad," his 1934 Ford Coupe everywhere. Then, he and wife Gloria went to Bonneville where Sam got salt fever so bad that he later sold his beloved "Shebad" to finance a LSR car. More than 72 of his pals banded together to form "The Maine Baron's Racing Team" and helped build a 200mph capable "Shebad Too."

By his second assault on Bonneville, Sam managed a 196 MPH before the engine blew. In January 2003, heartbreak arrived when Sam was killed in a car accident. The Maine Baron's team decided Sam's dream shouldn't die with him.

This year friend Gary Gustafson drove the coupe, entered as the "Sam Samson Special," 202.390 MPH on Monday, August 19th. These folks understand what land speed racing is all about.

From Ron Christensen: "The only car involved in a serious mishap was Dean Johnson. The former SCCA National Champion nearly died when his #3585 "Spirit of Minnetonka" streamliner powered by a 3-LITER Ford Taurus engine had a mechanical malfunction, turned sideways at about 250 and began an evil set of rolls. Thankfully, even though he suffered brain bruising, a full recovery is expected with an extended therapy and rehabilitation. Johnson, 62, had already set the F/GS record at 221MPH with the pretty yellow liner on a previous set of uneventful runs."

God Speed to health Dean.

Dave Newby, who more than 20 years served as Security Chief at Bonneville, passed away August 20th shortly after he was informed that Speedweek was over and that all had gone well.

For more than a half century Wendover Will, the 90-foot tall neon mechanical cowboy sign stood out in front of the State Line Hotel and Casino waving "howdy and c'mon in here" to all who passed. He was pulled down the Tuesday before Speedweek by the new owners and will be "a moseying on down the boulevard" to the other end of town. According to city officials, the familiar landmark will be resurrected in front of the new city complex in between the Pizza Hut and liquor store on West Wendover Boulevard. 🤠

Louise

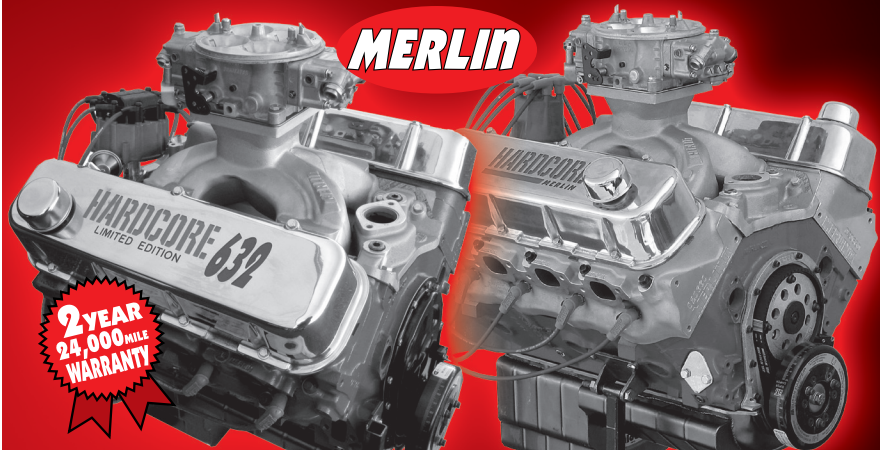
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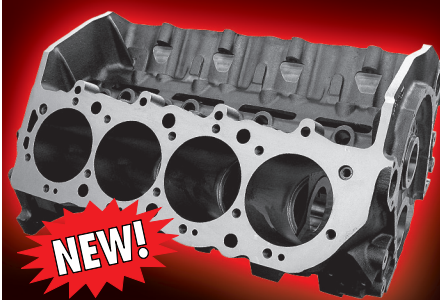


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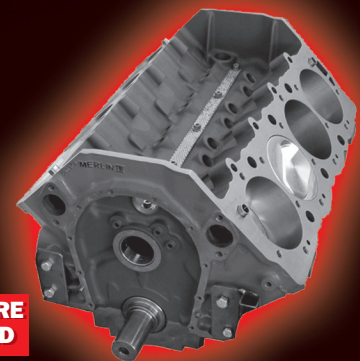
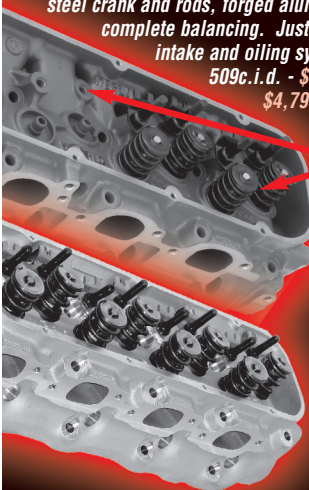


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