



FUEL FOR THOUGHT

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Nolan White, Speed Centurion: 1931 – 2002

Outsiders might say that the loss of a man's life racing a car is a waste, but it is a triumph for a man to pass from this world to the next doing what he loved.

For those who have labored after one, a land speed record has a flavor the slow will never know. A courageous, speed-seeking pioneer, Nolan White led by example, repeatedly tasting triumph and failure in the speed world. At Speedweek 2002 he clinched Top Time with a 413 M.P.H. The World Finals in October was another story where he paid for his speed adventures with his life.

The payment came due just after hurtling through the timing lights at 422 m.p.h. Nolan knew he had qualified for another world record about the same time he realized that all three parachutes had ripped off. He had been there before; where triumphant elation collides with the helplessness of being strapped into a runaway speed machine.

He succumbed to injuries three days later early on October 20th. Things like this gnaw at you. Your heart sags. You try to find comfort knowing that he punched out doing precisely, exactly what he lived for – ownership of the world land speed record title.

White, at 71, still had a vice-grip handshake. Focused like a laser beam, he'd burn a hole through anyone who got in his way. That is how great achievements are made manifest, to go with all you have, until you are utterly spent, after a seemingly impossible goal.

White's decade-long, titanic struggle for speed supremacy with Al Teague is salt lore. Together they chased top time honors for years. Said Teague, "Nolan was the racer I always wanted to be because he never gave up." The Spirit of Autopower streamliner's top speed was an awesome 442 m.p.h. World Record Holder Don Vesco noted, "Nolan told me that he was only 16 m.p.h. off my World Record and I knew he was serious about catching me."

A remarkable racing career from a kid born in dirt floor house, who started out using the bus lines to build cars out of junkyard parts, he was a member of the 200MPH Club and 300MPH chapter, as well as SCTA Points Champion in 1961, '63 and '64. One racer noted, *“When you look at Nolan and Rick you realize your own limitations. You know they are made of something different – not that the rest of us are chickens, it’s just they run on a different octane than the rest of us.”*

I'd like nothing better than to see Rick White and his son, Brad bring that streamliner back to the salt. I'm guessing here, but somehow, I think Nolan would too.