



## **FUEL FOR THOUGHT**

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### **FOR THE LOVE OF THE SPORT**

Bob Higbee was a man of few words and a multitude of actions. Regardless of your involvement with land speed racing – be it that of wrinkled veteran, or fresh-faced novice – Bob Higbee’s name, influence and spirit touched you and your pursuit of speed on the salt and on the dirt.

There is no way to count how many lives Bob Higbee saved over saved over the past half century, but we do know that he kept an eye on everyone. When it came to safety, Higbee had no favorites, no friends, no buddies; he was the man with the iron grip who would decrease the lung capacity of anyone who wanted the leave the line on his watch. Higbee made the famous wince just as much as the unknowns.

Ask A.J. Foyt, Don Garlits, Bobby Unser, the Granatelli boys, Fred Carillo, Paula Murphy, Marcia Holley, or Al Teague. They’ll tell all the same thing: “You only forgot to take a deep breath once before Bob tugged on the belts, otherwise you would have to make your run gasping for air because he had you cinched down in the seat so hard.”

I met Bob when starting to research my book on Bonneville’s history. A close-to-the-vest fraternity, some land speed racers kept me at arm’s length, sizing me up while trying to decide if I were worthy of trust and time. Not Mr. Higbee. After only one phone call we agreed to meet and his subsequent

actions set the tone, pace and challenge of deciphering the hidden story of speed.

Still strangers when we met, he nevertheless presented me with his entire collection of Bonneville programs, rule books, and results. He and wife Dotty (a familiar friendly face in the SCTA/BNI sales trailer) also brought along vintage photos and negatives from he and fellow San Diego Roadster Club pal Jack Harvey. It was an overwhelming cache of original materials. Dumbfounded, I drove home that night with an invigorated sense of enthusiastic purpose, hope and curiosity.

If Mr. Higbee could place his trust in me, to believe in me, then I was obliged to make sure he would never regret the kindness. When people do things like that, the human race is uplifted. My small gift in return was to dedicate the book, *Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth* to he and to my dear pal Tom Senter, because no one could, or has, loved Bonneville and its people more than him.

After only one trek out to a time trial event, watching him work tirelessly, sending car after car, bike after bike, truck after truck down the racecourse, I realized that Bob Higbee was the touchstone for the entire sport. In him lived the pure spirit of unselfishness; he had time for everyone.

Through him was portrayed the unquestionable character trait of commitment and contribution. After 50 years he still volunteered to arrive before anyone, work the entire event and then labor long after everyone had gone home until the landscape was put right. If the salt looked like no one had ever been there, then Bob was happy.

In him, racers saw focus and placed their trust -- through his hands flowed countless lives. How many did he save? Only God in heaven knows. Bob Higbee evolved into a living legend right before our eyes, witnessed time and again as racers felt uneasy unless Bob came over and tugged on their belts.

In recent years, long after his gripping strength had gone out of his arms, replaced by an unquenchable disease and the accompanying pain, racers still wanted Mr. Higbee to send them off. I looked at his actions as a speed blessing, something only possible when given by someone so devoted. It was because of this Higbee was inducted into the Dry Lakes Hall of Fame -- something he considered precious, the recognition of his peers.

Bob Higbee can be described many ways, but he is in every way -- our friend. His life and his legacy to all of us left behind on this earthly plane: someone who just wanted to keep us all safe.

Can any of us pick up the banner he held untarnishing high for so long? Probably not, but if you try, just do what you can, when you can for who you can then I believe you will keep the great spirit of Bob Higbee alive, vibrant and resonating throughout the wide world of land speed racing.

Bob Higbee left this world a better, safer place than he found it.