

Fuel For Thought

with "Landspeed Louise" Ann Noeth

Museum of Gasoline Pumps

*If the rest of the road is half as good
As the half that has gone before I'll swing
along with a singing heart And pray to
the Lord for more. I ease my bones at the
Half-Way House And turn my remember-
ing gaze From the twisting paths that my
feet have sought TO the new untrodden
ways. How long? How far? How hard?
How fine? How heavy or light the load? If
it's half as good as the half I've known
Here's Hail! . . . to the rest of the road.*
- Don Blanding, 1937, The Rest of the
Road

Those words inspire just as power-
fully today as they did when poet Don
Blanding pushed them onto paper
nearly seven decades ago. A self-made
global vagabond, Blanding under-
stood the open road when it was
exactly that. Devoid of neon, mercury
vapor and halogen beams screaming
some marketing drivel as you roll
along, America's roadways were once
the stuff of grand adventure and
national exploration where families
embarked on the coveted "summer
vacation" seeking to see more of this

great land that we live in. Mostly gone
now, there remain bits and pieces of
America's motoring past tucked into
sleepy burgs along the byways.

What started life as little more
than a wrecking yard and storage lot
has been transformed into a mar-
velous, magical compound of
fascinating remembrances from the
petrol perspective. Jack Mendenhall,
his family and friends created the
Museum of Gasoline Pumps in Buell-
ton, California as a proper shrine to
that which makes our vehicles get up
and go. What makes this place espe-
cially dear is that Jack lives right in
the middle of it all. Not a complete
Lone Ranger, Jack has his trusty com-
panion and sometimes grumpy (it's all
a big act, but flinch if he bellows to
keep him happy) curator Will Scott
who on good days will give you a
especially detailed tour that will keep
you there for hours yet seem like only
minutes.

Mendenhall is also a racer for all
seasons and any excuse is a reason-to-
race kind of guy. He has been a
powerful impact on drag racing,



inspired jalopy jaunts and hard-
charged in off-road racing, earned a
lifetime membership in the 200 MPH
Club and was elected to the Dry Lakes
Hall of Fame. In 1997, he organized
the security team at Black Rock Desert
for the British and American attempts
at the World Land Speed Record.
Throughout his storied racing adven-
tures, Mendenhall took a fancy to
signs, gas pumps and motoring mem-
orabilia the way an electro magnet has
affection for iron. After nearly 4
decades of collecting, the place will
park your eyebrows in the full-up
position the first time you see it.

Once a year, this fabulous private

collection is thrown open for The
Gold Coast Roadster and Racing Club
(GCRRC) to hold its annual Gas-Up
Party and Bar-B-Que. Held each
September it is attended by hundreds
of land speed racing luminaries:
drivers, riders, crews, officials and
devotees of speed. Because most of the
speed machines are left home, the
conversation is rampant, bench racing
hilarious and alcohol consumption
rivals white water rafting flow rates.

This party is the backdrop for the
Dry Lakes Hall of Fame Awards Cer-
emony. The GCRRC is a member of the
prestigious SCTA (Southern California
Timing Association), which was



formed in 1937 by car clubs in the Southern California area to carry on sanctioned time trials in a safe manner. Each year the clubs and former elected Hall of Famers are given a ballot to vote on the most deserving individuals and vehicles.

Unquestionably the oldest motorsport, all types of land driven vehicles are considered with special emphasis paid to the grand dowagers of the sport: streamliners, lakesters and roadsters. The power plants are internal combustion, turbine and jet engines, some harking back nearly a century.

The Gas-Up Party revs up around 9 AM as racers and hot rods begin to arrive. Jack's family, Mark, Vicki and Misty together with a skilled volunteer team will feed the hungry crowd of some 700 people around 1 PM with a delicious Santa Maria-style Tri-Tip steak barbecue, beans and salad. The bar in the "Chapel" serves drinks from a real, long antique wooden bar out of an old-time saloon. The Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony follows immediately with each candidate or car welcomed with a brief introduction. Each then says a few words, or a lot of words, but it is the sport's way of giving recognition for achievements in many areas. A souvenir program is produced each year that chronicles all the inductees.

For my book, Bonneville Salt Flats, the voting body elected me as Historian of the Year in 2001. Fast gal and my pal Tanis Hammond honored me to the assembled crowd with a knockout intro before presenting the fabulous diamond studded Hall of Fame ring (see sidebar). To this day I can tell you it is a most humbling experience, yet I'm very thankful that all the work and all the research into countless details chased down resulted in something the land speed racer holds dear.

Among Mendenhall's other treasures are electrified gas pump globe faces, oil cans (the ones where you bought the pour spout separately) old license plates and obscure memorabilia from the early age of the automobile. World's Fastest Man Andy Green and WLSR driver Richard Noble presented Jack and Will watches that were carried in the cockpit of ThrustSSC when it broke the speed of sound.

A contractor by trade, Mark built one garage after another as fast as Jack and Will could fill 'em up! There are now 12 garages crammed full and that doesn't include what's plastered all over the outside, or mounted on poles along "Mendenhall Alley". One of the most interesting artifacts is the Mobile Gasoline sign featuring John Cobb's

Railton-Mobil Special that set the LSR at 394.196 MPH in 1947, with a one way run over 400 MPH. Mendenhall found the sign in Wells Nevada covered over with paint and since there were only two made; he was compelled to restore it to former luster.

Interesting as all this may seem, it can be overwhelming to the first-time visitor, it takes a guided tour to not only deftly meander through the garages, but tour "gas pump row" where the evolution of the humble tank filler is laid out in a 50-foot L-shaped display. The three best candidates to conjure up the past are Jack, Mark and Will who I firmly believe have more fun giving the tour than the people taking the tour. Fair warning here, bring a sense of humor to this enchanted land of enameled signs and glowing globes where yesterday is vibrantly alive everyday.

The Dry Lakes Hall of Fame Ring



Every inductee is awarded a solid gold ring signifying her or his induction to the Hall of Fame. Etched into the top of the ring is a representation of what every racer see as they traverse the famed timed salt miles: two lines outlining the land speed course, converging to a point on floating mountain in the distance, with two cones on each side of the track. Encircled on each side, is "Dry Lakes Racing Hall of Fame."

Land Speed Racer and Motorcycle Racer Don Vesco Elected to the Motor Sports Hall of Fame of America

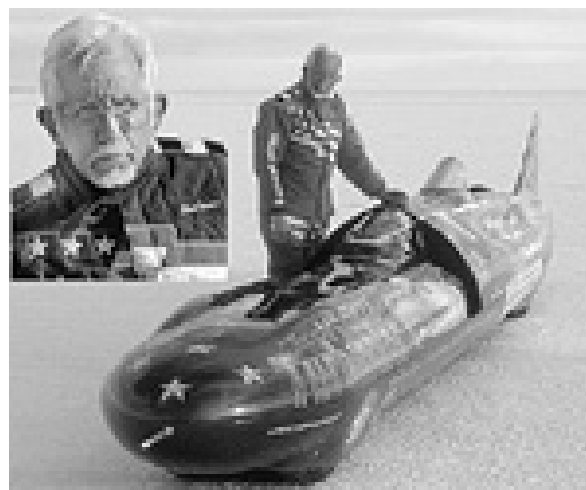
The late but rather amazingly great Don Vesco is one of several 2004 "Heroes of Horsepower" elected into the Motorsports Hall of Fame. In 2001 he set the World Speed Record for Wheel-driven cars at 458 MPH, driving the TEAM Vesco Turbinator. The record remains intact today.

The Hall of Fame enshrines many "Heroes of Horsepower" covering nine motorsports categories. A lengthy process that includes identification by a nominating committee made up of a large number of motorsports writers, historians, members of the Hall of Fame and peers across the nation selects inductees.

Eligibility for induction into the Motorsports Hall of Fame is extended to any person who has driven, piloted, owned, designed, built, supported, maintained, prepared or promoted motorized vehicles in pursuit of speed, distance or other records. An inductee must have been retired for at least three years or must have been engaged at the top level of his or her area of motorsports for at least 20 years. Inductees are characterized by their desire to win, mastery of their field and the courage to innovate.

A panel of historians, retired competitors, journalists, and prior living inductees vote for the final selections. Each inductee receives the Hall of Fame's prestigious "Horsepower" award - an original bronze statuette created by Ann Arbor, Michigan sculptor Michael Curtis. The annual induction ceremony takes place in the summer.

Located at the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America Museum housing are over 40 racing and high performance vehicles. The Museum showcases exhibits and photographs of the personalities, manufacturers and machines of all kind of racing and their rich legacy. The Novi, Michigan museum has well over 100 items on exhibit, most of them highly significant race vehicles, such as land and water speed record holders, both antique and current.



Personal note: As a member of both the nominating committee and voting panel, I am forever grateful to my colleagues for recognizing the achievements of Don Vesco. It was three short years ago when I first



nominated him in the motorcycle category believing that his accomplishments on two-wheels made him overwhelmingly deserving of recognition. Factor in his many other accolades in land speed racing,

road racing, midgets, sprints, the list is mighty long, and it is doubtful anyone would question this honor. My only regret is that he will not be able to accept the award personally because the ravages of prostate cancer ended his record breaking in December of 2002. God Speed Don. And to all you stubborn old coots out there who haven't been tested, get busy. 🏍️

Louise