

Fuel For Thought

with "Landspeed Louise" Ann Noeth

USFRA World Of Speed

The Bonneville Salt Flats has long been a place where the lines of fantasy and reality blend together with stunning bravado leaving the visitor to experience a sense of wonder, awe and beauty not unlike a trip to the Grand Canyon, K2, or Cape Horn. It is both raw and comforting as the harsh wilderness conditions fold seamlessly with the passion that pours out from the need to express ones self creatively, tapping the ingenuity that whirls deep within the human spirit.



The oddest, but most unmistakable addition to salt racing was the debut of the "Check-In Chicken", aka "Bonneville Bob Racing Rooster", an 8-foot high statue that marks the Registration Desk.

Marvin Jenkins knows this as well as he knows his name and like most men who are trapped by the allure of the salt beds, he can but only superficially admit the attraction, jealously guarding his true feelings and staying wary of his emotions that rise and fall like the swells of a confused sea. After 52 years, he sat gripping the huge steering wheel with seasoned mechanics hands as a thunderous roar gurgled up from deep within the brilliant blue and orange Mormon Meteor. Today the Curtiss Conqueror aircraft engine came to life and 84 year old Jenkins, would drive the salt, as his record-setting father did more than a half century ago.

"It was thrill, but I was more concerned about how all the moving parts were getting along", said Jenkins carefully choosing his words to remain technical, "We made it up to 120 mph, never got out of 2nd gear, and the car felt the same as it did when I drove it 50 years ago. We were just tickled that it stayed together after all hardships we had getting to this point." A long time in between runs for the man who was 18-year olds when his dad sent him back to Indianapolis to help Duesenberg build the car.

John Hollansworth of Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, who built a replica of the 1934 Ab Jenkins Special, joined Jenkins, a Pierce Arrow powered by a V12 engine. "It was a great time, we got up to 112 mph," said Hollansworth, a Great American Race participant, "but it felt like 150 mph, that was all the old car had." Inspired since childhood with the Jenkins legacy; he brought the dream to life after he retired. When the car fired up and its tires started crunching salt several folks reported that Jenkins no-nonsense eyes went teary. Salt Fever folks, at its most revealing moments.

Ellen Wilkensen, USFRA club secretary, reported the 17th annual event had 185 entries, 90 of which were there to contest Bonneville records, 65 came to run in the 130MPH Club (including two go-karts), six bar stools, three McLean Monocycles, a junior dragster, three motorized bicycles, and a pedal unicycle shod with a Viper Wheel and tire.

The 300 mph chapter got a new member: Casey Clark running in class AA/BGL managed a 309.050 record and Bob Ragsdale parked his name in the 200MPH Club ledger using a 219.653 record in D/CBGAULT class.

Over in F Class, Fuel modified Roadster, third generation salt racer Shane Freudiger drove his way into the 200MPH Club with 205.653

record that eclipsed the mark set by his grandfather two decades ago. Phil Freudiger, 78, started lakes racing in the 40's. Willie, 45, his son, now does all the tuning and has spent three years trying to put Shane into the 200MPH Club.

"Ed and I are his biggest cheerleaders" beamed the ever-cheerful Cris Shearer, who together with her resolute husband were inducted this year into the Dry Lakes Racing Hall of Fame and serve as course stewards for all speed trials, "everything cooperated this time, all the elements came together for them, it was a wonderful thing to witness."

The family trio blew up the engine one year, hydrauliced in the pits the next when it was loaded up with nitro sending the rods sailing up through the pistons. Money got tight so engine builder and partner Robert Cline built the current 170 CID V8 mouse motor using only four pistons out of near junk parts.

"Shane's very first run on the salt was over 200," noted the elder Freudiger, "The only mistake he made was turning out too soon because he didn't realize he was going that fast and nearly spun the car. Driving is different on the salt, everybody thinks its easy, but its not." Beautifully done, in only 2 runs, before the rings had even been seated.

Of the three top times of the meet, only one set a record: Jim Owen and his Bad For Good Racing Kawasaki laying down a 214.309 pass. Owen, 42, also set a MPS-F 1350 class record at 213 mph; he is a firefighter in Iron Mountain Michigan (1,750 miles one-way). Dan Johnson, Owen's boss, is his crew chief. Talk about role reversal. Owen's crew consists of wife Kristi, his father, Denny, and brother Wayne, who fly in from Belfast, Maine.

His existing record was bumped up to 207 at the 2003 Speedweek, so it was reclamation time by the time World of Speed rolled around. The deed was done first at 209 and then 213 mph with the 214 mph speed pumped out during the dramatic final run of the meet Kawasaki ZX-12R.

"Joe Amo had already turned in a 213 run so there was a lot of pressure when I left the starting line", said Owen, "I was a nervous wreck. Afterwards, Joe came over and congratulated me; that's what I like about land speed racing. The people are friendly folks out to have a good time, always willing to help you out. Days like this



If challenge is what you crave there this one's for you . . . the bristling, battling barstool races, where a push broom can take on an whole new meaning. Top Stooler for the lakester class was Larry Huff with an 41.790 and Cecil McCray nailed a streamliner class record of 41.661 mph. The dueling stools are electric.

don't come easy or often, so I enjoy it when I can."

After being away from driving a racecar for some years Betty Burkland, 63, was just delighted that it was still so much fun – never mind gathering Fast Lady of the Meet with a top speed of 241.861mph in George Fields black sliver of a competition coupe.

"As you get older you get more cautious," explained Burkland who was 46 the first time she drove a racecar, "I knew I had to get the car to other end if I wanted a chance to drive it again. If you aren't willing to push the envelope just a little bit then you aren't going to have the benefit of full experience."

If the name sounds familiar, it might be because the petite hot shoe has a strapping buck of boy named Tom who wrangles the family dream-sicle orange 411 streamliner into the dicey 400 realm. Diminished shut down areas have kept the car at home until better conditions arrive, so presume she got bored.

"It is a very easy car to drive," noted known pedal masher Burkland before the rather exciting oil fire during a plus 200 record run, "I had told George that if the car didn't feel right I would stop and get out."

Tom Burkland describes what happened:

"We had a typical salt racing experience. Mom got her familiarization run out of the way at 241mph (on a 251mph record) and was on the way to qualifying on the second run at about 253 when a wrist pin failed. This caused major damage to the engine. Mom felt the engine lay down and proceeded to shut down and deploy the chutes. She was not aware that there was a 20-foot tail of flaming oil under and behind the car that was creating a lot of concern for the safety



Bett Burkland after her 241 mph run that snagged Fast Lady of the Meet honors driving George Fields' stylish Trackmaster Fabrications Special competition coupe.



Kids are welcome, along with street vehicles, and can try for speed honors in the 130 and 150 mile per hour class with only a few safety precautions.



When you travel all the way from Michigan to run your bike, its a great day when you end up with Top Speed of the Meet for Motorcycles. Firefighter Jim Owen laid down a whopping 214 mph run to nudge the crown off the head contender Joe Amo. Wife Kristi is part of Owen's crew.

crews and many spectators watching what was the last run of the evening. She slowed and made the turn off course heading for the return road figuring to coast as far towards the pits as possible only to be faced with many trucks rushing towards her at high speed. Kind of a keystone cops routine with everyone chasing after a racecar that had no real reason to assist in their concerns. Jim Shuit from the USFRA safety crew eventually drove onto the chute riser line with his truck to stop the car, which happened rather quickly. With the extensive firewall sealing effort and fresh air breathing system George has installed in this car the fire was undetectable to the driver."

Reality check: How many sons have mothers who wear Nomex, or provide deadpan commentary on mom's fire-belching speed run?

Nerves were jangled because the car caught fire last year and got into the cockpit burning the driver's air hose generating a lung full of heat at 290 mph.

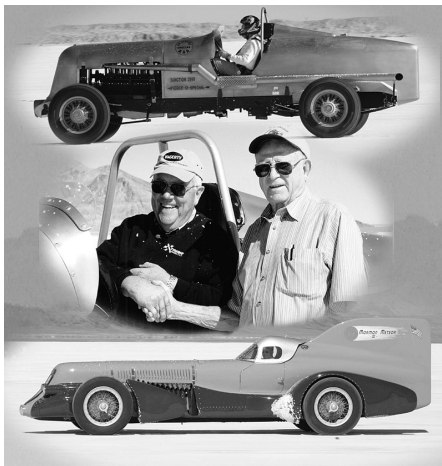
"I knew the engine was dead," recalled mom Betty, "but felt perfectly safe. The car did just what George had designed it to do, dump the fuel out the bottom." She was quick to add that George and Gretchen Field's crew of Bob Tyler, Kenny Morsk, Fred Dannenfelzer, Bo Richards, and Dave Castile were a great help. About that Fast Lady Award? "When they told me I didn't squeal as much as Tanis (Hammond), but almost, I sure had fun."

A somber, yet comforting moment came for Mary Lou and the Larsen family when some of Fred Larsen's ashes were packed into Mike Nish's streamliner parachute Friday.

"We knew the run had to be at least 300 mph at the 5-mile," explained car owner and dad Terry Nish, "When we hit 315 we were all tickled to get Fred down there on a good run."

On Saturday Mike Nish claimed Top Speed of the Meet with 330.695 run, good enough to qualify on the 332 Danny Boy Streamliner Thomason and Tradup record, but was unable to put together a record run with the 360CID Klein-built bowtie motor. Nish now intends to install an AA motor to coax out another 50 mph.

"I dream of Bob Summers record," he mused when talking about the 558 CID naturally aspirated big block



John Hollansworth (left & top) is congratulated by Marv Jenkins for the fine job of recreating the Ab Jenkins Special. Jenkins drove the Mormon Meteor (below) on the salt for the first time in 53 years.

going in, "I believe we might have a 400 mph car but it that has yet to be proven"

After they put the amethyst streamliner on the trailer, out came the Nish motorized barstool, which set two records: 46.2mph in the lakester class and streamliner class 45.6 mph. The boys know how to have fun.

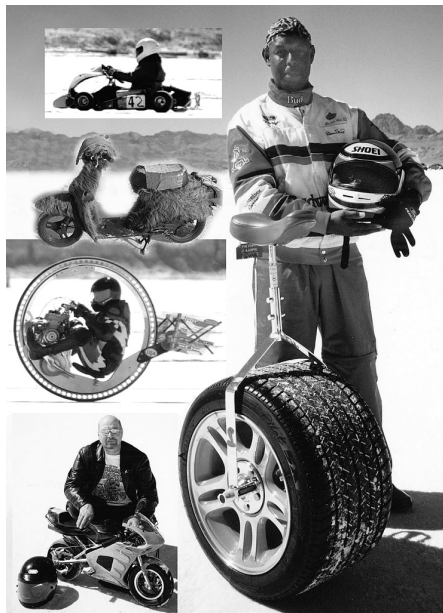
SCTA President Roy Creel's '34 5-window Ford depends on a vintage 4-cylinder engine that achieved a top speed of 173 with Sam Buck at the wheel. Creel is responsible for 29 of the 36 Vintage 4 records in the record book.

"I don't remember seeing Roy so happy," chuckled Buck who broke the duo own 1996 157mph record, "We were only hoping to just to get to 160 and ended up with 171.489. . . Once in a while, everything just works." Buck, 61, from Agua Dulce, California set 14 records of his own.

Dan Wright, USFRA Chief Technical Inspector and Webmaster noted that this year's time trials was "Our largest event ever conducted on exceptional salt conditions."

Unique to USFRA events is the popular 130MPH Club, where street legal vehicles can earn a certified time slip with minimal safety additions, usually only a helmet, driveshaft loop for rear wheel drive cars and full leathers for bikes. "We had a huge turnout," said a pleased Wright, "The 130 folks are so enthused, they represent the next crop of land speed racers."

Wright observed that the small bike classes, ones that had not been contested for some years, were suddenly getting bumped up daily. "The



It's all fun, fun, fun, for the entrants of the USFRA's World of Speed held annually in September on the great white dyno.

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rookie riders were trading records back and forth, having a great time and swore they'd be back next year."

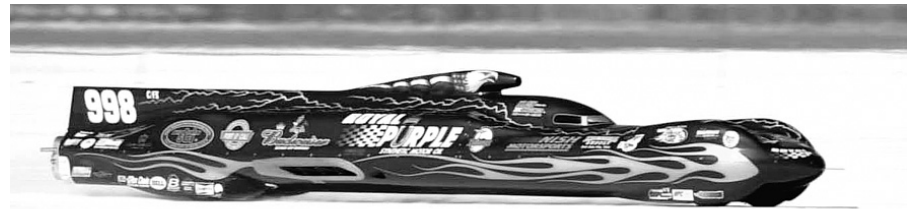
There is a little known, unwritten courtesy rule that if two vehicles are in impound at the same time running for the same record, the slowest qualifier goes first. This way, all get a chance to set a record – even if it may fall minutes after it is set – it is a win/win situation. Where else in motorsports do you find such generosity?

The deep-rooted power of passion is nowhere more evident than what courses through the veins of Rex Svoboda, self-proclaimed freelance gear head, when he drives his hand-built dazzling blue gull wing McLaren M6GT for time only.

"Oh man, I gotta do this . . ." gushed Svoboda during his first visit to the salt in 1991, "It was Al Teague's 409 run that imprinted itself on my psyche."

After three years the Missoula, Montana resident finally ran 201 mph – a single mile-per hour over his goal set more than a decade ago. Next aspiration? a vehicle that will compete in a class. Side note: Svoboda uses Michelin Pilot Sport ZR rated tires, but had been cautioned by race officials about poor handling characteristics, so he asked Gene and Betty Burkland if they might test one on their tire spinner: the result? Failure came at 417 mph to the astonishment of all. Don't tell the lawyers.

Golden Eagle Motors motorized bicycles ran 35 mph and Lucious Lee pedaled his way to a 7.8 mph time on his Viper unicycle, but nothing could outshine the unsinkable Kerry McLean who brought out a trailer full of his attention getting monocycles. Watching these things move under their own power is a sight that one's mind has a difficult time processing as real, yet McLean has managed to get the wheels licensed for the street and they are remarkably maneuverable.



Mike Nish pilots the flaming purple family streamliner to Top Speed of the Meet with a 330 mph run.

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Richard Nallin,
one of nearly
50 racing pix-
ies who call
themselves
Team Elves.



Team Elves wins for the most enthusiastic bunch of motorcycle folks who not only bring the most bikes to play with, but also have their own gourmet food crew to prepare Elf Chow served atop stylish AstroTurf, a resident paramedic and perky publicist. "The Elves are ambitious, friendly and I'm lucky to be part of it," stated recall candidate for California Governor Michael J. Wozniak, aka CEWoz,, "They motivate each other to achieve goals and do so with great style."

Comprised of more than 50 people from all over the world "literally" they are the manifestation of a virtual Internet team that did more than just talk about setting bike records. „This stuff IS NOT as easy as it looks," chirped another Elf Pat German after snagging two of the Elves nearly dozen records. Elves gather yearly for the simple pleasure of going fast on God's own raceway. This year Team Elves camp was 200-foot long populated by numerous race bikes and 130/150 club bikes of all brands.

"We really ought to make up an appreciation plaque for those USFRA folks, they put on a hell of a great event," proclaimed Elven Crew Chief Aaron Wilson, "They understand what it's all about. They approached land speed racing from a perspective that makes the event much more fun and makes us WANT to do right by them."

Louise