Speed Week 2003

Fuel For Thought

with “Landspeed Louise” Ann Noeth

A little freckled face strawberry blond scared a lot of big, strong men during the SCTA/BNI Speedweek event in August. The short version: 26 year old rookie driver Tricia Kisner set top speed of the meet at 325 m.p.h., and joined the prestigious 300 MPH chapter of the 200 MPH club while driving Joe Law’s Pontiac powered “Grumpy Old Men” red lakester. You might call it a “Cinderella of Speed” story, but this was all fact and no fiction folks.

Needless to say, the car begged a name change after the first record run. Since I was already at the 6-mile mark snapping parachute blossom shots, it was easy to scurry off to catch Kisner as she rolled to a stop. Cool as a stain, her full-bore smile was infectious and with the team’s permission I duct taped over “Grumpy” lettering and inscribed a hasty “Happy” before the car head back to the pits.

No longer “a man’s sport,” land speed racing has a new, exceptional role model and she is the third woman to join the 3 Club, claiming her bright blue hat right after Tanis H Rainbow and Dr. Jean Nie Pflum. Adding this year’s other speed queens, the total number of ladies in the 200MPH club is now an even dozen. They include: Allison Volk, set an A/GR record at 236 mph (dad is Larry Volk, a veteran LSR activist and racer) and Pam Curtis with a 287.826 mph in E/FS class.

Other ladies to be congratulated for a job VERY WELL DONE include: Julie Slaymaker-Dollansky with a 136 mph record in XF/POGCC class and in the mighty tyke realm, Cathy Butler cranked out three records riding her 50cc powered bike, Theresa Metty set two records on a 290cc bike and Kary Gassaway romped to a new 82mph record with a 100cc bike.

I have long advocated that no vehicle - land, water, or air - has the remotest idea who is driving and only responds to the input given. Further, the only reason there have been more men than woman in the sport is because more men HAVE CHOSEN to be involved. As the always-astute Betty Burkleand would tell her son Tom, “the car does not know what kind of driver is behind the wheel,” she explained, “By the last four runs I was experimenting and pushing harder. On the last run I gave the car full throttle in 2nd gear and the back end broke loose, I thought ‘Omi-gawd!’ and I lifted off the pedal until the car straightened out and then got back on. It sure was not the smartest thing I did.” Considering the average age of a LSR activist and racer) and Pam Curtis it was puzzlingly sad that the BNI Board of Directors neglected to include details about their contributions to land speed racing. Only much beloved Chief Starter Bob Higbee, also on lap duty, was recognized in print.

I believe we are in the midst of a dramatic metamorphosis in the sport. Time will only tell if the thrilling speed battles that raged between the likes of Teague and White will ever percolate up again in other pits. Teague would not have achieved what he did without White’s perennial assault for dominance. The same goes for White. Each were one half of the same zipper that ripped across the landscape - up and down, down and up - searching for more speed. More than contestants, they were mechanical gladiators, pitted against each other’s time slip.

Speaking about Kisner’s achievement, Teague told me, “It’s a sign of the times, and I think it is about time some of the fairer sex had their name engraved on the HOT ROD Magazine Top Speed Trophy, I’m all for it.”

Ever cheerful and kindly Carl Heap became “Grumpy” from the standpoint of pit persona and run attention. Churning out 272 inky black diesel smokey miles per hour, Heap was not to be outrun for a car that’s easily capable of 500 mph.

Partners Brad White, 22, and veteran fabricator Julio Hernandez, 29, showed up with their “learning car” and White laid claim to a 158mph record. The ‘29 primer black and aluminum powered Ford Roadster, #1311 (affectionately AKA 131 the second) competed in F/GMR class running a 183 CID four cylinder Chevrolet. With grandson of Nolan and son of Rick, did the family peerage proud considering he nailed the record on his first pair of salt runs. “It sure was a rote reversal,” noted the youngest White, “I’m usually the one strapping in dad or grandpa, but this time it was dad doing the buckling.” Confessing that his motivation came from his venerable grandfather because despite his age, there was never any quit in him and “Everywhere we looked you couldn’t help but think of him and what he had done over the years.”

It certainly was “kids week” on the salt with Mike Cook Jr. turning in a 248 average in B/bugr. Cherub face Cook not only works diligently at his...
gentleman, according to the God of Impound Dan Warner, the junior Cook drove all over thanking everyone who had helped him get the record -- tower personnel, course workers, time slip tent, starting line - "He personally went to thank each one, not just call them on the radio," noted Warner. That had to take a couple of hours just to find everyone!

Warner added that he saw at least 30 new cars that set records, some with other veterans, but mostly new faces that makes him believe the sport is getting an injection of new people, especially in the bike classes. "It is wonderful to watch all the kids that I saw grow up and hanging around with their parents for years now fielding successful cars of their own," chuffed Warner. "The family oriented theme is very much alive in our amateur sport. They learned to set obtainable goals, reach them and who knows where they will go!"

Another racer's 'kid' finally managed to earn a 200MPH Club red hat. Let's hear it for Danny Thompson, aged to earn a 200MPH Club red hat.

Carl Heap huffed and puffed so the Phoenix ran an eye-popping 272mph! Congrats to the crew too!

Top Speed of the meet went to rookie Tricia Kisner flanked by car owner Joe Law and crewman Bob Beatty.

Louise