

January 2004
Goodguys Goodtimes Gazette

FUEL FOR THOUGHT

BY LOUISE ANN NOETH

SCTA/BNI World Finals

The 2003 World Finals was, in every sense of the word, a cooperative effort. Starting with the generous, hard-working souls who volunteer to stage the event for the pleasure of the racing hopefuls, right through to the spectators, the time trials are a true *Espirt de corps*. Land speed racing on the Bonneville Salt Flats, in my opinion, is the planet's friendliest form of motorsports. Money and status are virtually worthless in comparison to making, or maintaining a friendship.

Throughout its storied decades hundreds have abandoned their own racing machines to help a direct competitor achieve a record. Some go as far as stripping parts, even crippling their own vehicle so that another might have the chance to achieve a measure of glory. Others simply leave their machine at home and travel to the salt at their own expense just help out a pal.

"What started out as a hobby" observed George Fields about land speed racing in his unhurried Texan drawl, "Is now a lifestyle." He is not alone. Many feel the same way about seeking speed in their charging chariots of homegrown origins. It is infectious, contagious thinking that draws in many, releases few and gnaws at all. How fast will it go? Those that want to know realize they must test themselves on the salt.



Fields and his wife, Gretchen, live the fast life through the performance of #125, a shiny black brute called *Trackmaster Special*. Joined by "SOOPA" crew chief

Dave Casteel, the trio embodies the full representation of land speed racing. Both Casteel and Mr. Fields have set records in excess of 300 mph with the blown fuel Competition Coupe.

This year, Betty Burkland, 63, wife of Gene and mother of Tom, was invited to romp along the long course. Taking full advantage of the opportunity, the lead-footed frisky pixie wearing lucky duck socks earned entrée into the 200MPH Club when she set a new class E/BFCC record of 263mph. “One person’s name goes in the rule book,” mused mom Burkland, “You are never alone when setting a record. I’m just floored about how many people helped me do this, it’s the most fun I’ve had for a long time.” She added that it was gratifying to help the team get test data to advance the development of the engine mosey along.

The effort was aided by talented crewmembers from three other teams: *Spirit of 76* streamliner, *DRM Racing* lakester and the *#411 Burkland Streamliner*. Despite the nuclear reactor mix of personalities, procedures and strategies, the group worked together with stunning cooperation and respect. Watching it was worth ten times the price of a pit pass (\$5.) The power of friendship effortlessly evaporated egos distilling them all into a single team after a record for a gal they all admired.

“We has success in the face of adversity,” remarked SCTA President Roy Creel who also serves as Race Director for each event, “A mystery storm flooded the Speedweek course and then a fire in our storage unit destroyed 17 miles of timing wire, 700 cones, all the winding equipment, and some fire extinguishers.” In all about \$30,000 got toasted, insurance covered the loss, but officials had to scramble hard as the double disaster transpired just 10 days before the event. Thank the Utah Salt Flats Racing Association (USFRA) for the equipment loan.



From the racer and spectator perspective, it was transparent, a non-issue as the event seemed to operate as though nothing had gone awry.

According to Chief Timer Glenn Barrett, of the 138 entries, 92 were cars and 46 bikes that made 529 qualifying attempts. Add 85 record runs for a total of 614 passes during the event to give 62% records! Barrett also observed the top speeds of the meet for car and bike were turned in by sequential numbers: #998 was Mike Nish in the family AA/GS streamliner opening eyes with his fabulous 360 mph run and #999 was Sam Wheeler riding the 1350cc EZ-Hook to 326 mph pass. Unfortunately, both were plagued with parts failures and were unable to set records.

Top Speed car record was 313mph set by Rick Yacoucci driving Jack Costella’s *Nebulous Theorem II* streamliner. “Thank you, Jack, for giving me the best ride in the world!” said an animated Yacoucci of his red arrow ride, “The car handles so

well it's almost boring to drive." Fixing the sprocket alignment woes that plagued them at Speedweek in August, the raven-haired pilot did mention he had his hands full on a rough patch just off the starting line and that they ran the engine rich (1,500 degree EGT) yet still had 2% leak down across the board which means there's more power in the pot so write in that I/BFS record with pencil!



Dennis Clayton from *Motorhead Performance* recorded a 245 mph average in the 1350cc MPS-BG class before roasting the clutch on his Suzuki, boosting the record by 26 mph. He edged out John Noonan and Steve Kneum, both of whom turned in 243mph records. Bikes, folks, these are two-wheelers. Yipes! Larry Forstall, who owns the bike Kneum rode, became a grandfather during the meet. Sweet.

The bitter pill arrived Friday afternoon when Seth Hammond, while driving his #77 lakester on a plus 300mph run, lost traction and crashed at the top end of the timed course. Earlier that day, during record runs, he lay down a new land speed record in D blown fuel lakester at 304.198 earning him entree into the 300MPH chapter of the 200MPH Club. Hammond, who suffered from an annoying case of "manitude" trying to run in excess of 3 bills remarked of the feat, "I can once again do my laundry with my wife."



He was referring the lovely and charming Mrs. Hammond who wears the coveted blue hat; Tanis is the 1st woman to attain 3 Club stature. Until that point, "ladies first" Hammond could only doff 2Club red head gear earned the year he purchased the car. The ever-thoughtful Hammond thanked #77 most graciously; he vigorously hook then popped the cork off a chilled bottle of Dom Perignon champagne spraying the car first before imbibing, or offering a congratulatory swig to engine builder Lee Gustafson and crewmembers Dr. Jeannie Pflum and Mike Dawson. Pflum, a 300 mph chapter member, ran a 650cc production motorcycle (prepped by poppa Lee) up to 152 mph after only two familiarization rides.

Built in 1962 by Tim Rochlitzer and Ernie Bennett, Hammond has owned the car since 1981, but had been infatuated with it since childhood. The car has carried more people into the 200MPH Club than any other land speed car in history and currently holds a dozen class records. A testament to a well-built car

combined with a generous tug on the safety belts by the starting line folks -- all his injuries are minor. Some years back SCTA had required Hammond to upgrade his roll cage to current standards, which certainly played a part in his remarkable survival. He loves this sport so don't be surprised in the least if we see him back with a rebuilt #77, or whole new car. Hammond commented on the tumble: "It was unfortunate, but like Arnold Schwarzenegger once said, "I'll be back!"

Mixed disappointment and glee was found in alcohol powered *Razzberry Rocket* pit. Campaigned by the Rochlitzer family, it squeaked over the 300 mph mark with 33 year-old son Brad at the wheel, but was unable to set a record. Marveling at his father's non-stop racing focus, younger son Brian, 29, noted, "It's the most fun he's had on the salt in long time; dad might be 73, but acted like he was 18, it's hard for us to keep up with him." The kid is serious and so was that 301 one-way run.

John Rains, aka "The Obliterator," had double driving duty, running his familiar #99 purple and ivory Firebird smashed the existing F/BFAIt 208 record by recording 251 average – a gain of 42 mph! Phoenix Cadillac dealer John Lund trotted out a black CTS for Rains to pilot having been inspired by a cable channel program on land speed racing. The "salt virgin's" car turned in a respectable 197.5 mph one-way run and established a 187 mph record in E/BGC. Not the 200 they were hoping for, but I'd wager Lund is the fastest Cad man in the nation right now.

"Worst Case of Salt Fever" goes to *Ferguson Racing* who managed to park three new members in the 200MPH Club in four days. A record in itself! Congrats to "Jellybean" Mike Cook, 49, Chris Field, 21 and Dave Kirsch, 23.



"The kids ruined me," wailed automotive machinist Jellybean, "I told them the only time you get up before 9 is for record runs. We had to get up early every day last week and now I can't sleep until noon anymore." Looking for a red hat since the 70's – longer than both his red hat companions have been alive.

"I thought I was getting an ulcer," lamented cherub faced Don Ferguson III about the last record, the hardest to get because they had wrung most everything else out of the engine, "Trying to keep the numbers in line and the car tuned so that my guys could bump the same record. I was so anxiety ridden that I didn't sleep at all Friday night then fixed a timing error Saturday morning and we picked up 5 mph."

This was the first time "III" raced without his father, Don Ferguson Jr., it was clear the team's talents were owing to Don Ferguson Senior, the team's patriarch who, according to Jellybean, "gave all of us the mechanical ability we use today."

Finished with bumping barrage, the boys wandered over to help Jim and Randy Travis, who were having problems with the *Pumpkin Seed's* Mercury engine topped with Ardun heads. "Jim can be a rabid dog with crab apple attitude," smirked Jellybean, "But he cried like a puppy when his son Randy made it into the 2Club." Chris Field and III worked a little fuel and valve magic, shuffled the gears and next thing you know Randy qualified on the XXF/GS record. The key, explained III, was to give the humbly sharp Don Francisco the most important job: ensuring that Travis the elder "didn't touch a single thing once the car was impounded."

Take four Bryants, add 10 passes and put 50 run miles on the family gray and black competition coupe. Dad Tom started by nailing a 240 record and then watching son's Jeff and Barry reprise pop's speed before installing grandson Tim in the car for licensing. The 20 year-old -- wrenched from fast stock -- ran 207 MPH in the quarter and 204 MPH in the mile on his 3rd run. "This was the meet of many runs," observed *Impound Counselor* Dan Warner.

The firesuit shuffle continued over in the *Wilson and Waters* pit after Greg Waters hurled the sparkling plum amethyst brick that looks like a blown fuel roadster to an impressive 253 record. Converted to gas, BNI Chairman Mike Manghelli slid into the warmed seat and earned 2Club admittance with 232 record -- after 28 years!

"This came out of the blue," confessed a relieved Manghelli who made the grade by a scant .9 m.p.h., "It could have been .1 m.p.h. over, I had been so close so many times, there was no reason to get my hopes up, so I was probably the calmest of the group." Manghelli, a longtime SCTA volunteer who has served on the board for nine years, holds the distinction of setting the world's fastest VW record -- 199.902 -- in 1985. Keith Pedersen, a software engineer who wrote the code that produces the results for SCTA/BNI events drove Manghelli's *Cyber Racing/Neuspeed* mini truck inking a Class F/M/MP 126mph record.

Other new 2Club members were Jim Kitchen with a 201 average in C/STR and J. Minneker who drove the *GM Performance Team Saturn Ion* to a 212 average in G/BFALT. Kenny Hoover stretched the AA/FS *Plastic Express* to a 307 record to follow Seth Hammond into the 3 Club Chapter.

The Ohio State University's *Buckeye Bullet* electric streamliner driven by Chuck Taylor and powered by a silly speed secret battery motor couldn't come to grips with current consistency but did have the longest parachute of the meet. Even though the team inked a new 256 E3/S class record, make no mistake -- the 251 World Record set in 1999 by Pat Rummerfield remains intact.

Frank Salmen prouided up pop Chuck when he established a AA/FR record of 263.781. Lee Sicilio rode herd on his eye-popping orange *Daytona Charger* in B/C/PRO for a 225 mph record average. Skip Higginbottem tapped USFRA president Gary Allen to wrangle his gas lakester to 254 mph tuning run. Watch these fellows. Kugel & Kids conspired with Mike LeFever's to lay down a new D/BGC class record of 265.

Bikes alive! But who is it??? I suppose it makes somebody happy, but for anyone trying to discern the rider of a record setting SCTA/BNI motorcycle will be out of luck. Instead of the name of the brave soul who twists the grips and dives under the paint, the listing merely states the factory's name. Useless trivia, but that's the way the bikers want it. For instance *Team McLeish Brothers* jumped class three times and got three records with their Honda powered streamlined sidecar. Did Derek ride?

The two-wheeled posse from Dallas-based *Southwest Superbikes*, came a hankering for 200, but turned tail .847 m.p.h. short. The galling salt swat steeled them to return next year to improve Randy Lazenby's 1350cc APS-F record parked at 199.153 m.p.h. Astute as they are amusing, the boys declared they needed not more power, but "gription." When they find it, look out for the Yeeee haws!

