



FUEL FOR THOUGHT

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The Ultimate AI

The Bonneville Salt Flats is an immense expanse of land so large the astronauts use it as a landmark while orbiting the planet. So blindingly crystal white, so endlessly flat, you can see the curvature of the earth. It is here people come to test themselves and their speed machines.

It was here that I began to understand the penetrating impact and inspiring influence of Jane and Al Teague -- nothing short of great American champions. Because Al officially retired the Spirit of 76 Streamliner from active competition at the close of the 2002 season, it seems fitting to pay some respect to a his mighty steed. Fear not, Al's driving days is not over; I have on good authority the red roadster will ride again! Hi Ho Hemi motor, away!

Here are few perspectives from folks in the motorsports community about two ordinary people who have done rather extraordinary things. Let's start with Shav Glick, that inveterate motorsports columnist at the Los Angeles Times. He said: *In all my years of reporting, and that covers a hell of a long time, I have never met anyone so unassuming and unpretentious who has accomplished such a rare feat as Al Teague.*

Don Sherman, former editor of Car&Driver Magazine and now Technical Editor for Automobile Magazine added: *Al Teague has achieved more speed with fewer resources than any man or woman in racing while upholding the highest standards of sportsmanship.*

Offenhauser Author and Automotive Curator for the Smithsonian Museum Gordon Eliot White revealed: *I only met Al fleetingly at Bonneville where he was a prince and I -- speed-wise -- was a pauper, but I was honored to be on the same course with him.*

Glen Barrett is the Chief Timer Southern California Timing Association who reminds everyone that he has "the Best Seat in the House" because he gets to watch every car come whistling down the sparkling Bonneville racecourse observed: *There are only a few people that draw the attention like Al Teague; he and his crew are what land speed racing is all about. He lives his dream and we lucky few are fortunate to not only witness it, but also be part of it.*

Tom Burkland, driver of the Dreamscicle Orange 411 streamliner, is one of only very few racers that have exceeded 400 miles an hour. He is also the youngest of these speedsters and poured out his heart with:

Al is one of our heroes; he has served as an example to all of us with his dedication and tenacity in pursuit of the elusive high-speed records over the years. His car, the entire operation are traditional "Hot Rod" all the way. It came from his mother's back yard garage primarily supported by his own funding and a large volunteer crew effort. The configuration of the car is unique. It is the only single engine two-wheel drive car to exceed 400 mph. This combination has made more 350+ mph runs than any vehicle in history, what incredible repeatable success. As former Gary Cagle Chief Timer used to say when Al left the starting line, Heads up! It's Al Teague."

Richard Parks, son of Wally Parks, founder of the National Hot Rod Association, noted: *It is difficult to separate Al from his gracious wife, Jane, and her brother, Alan Welch. I see them together, as a team, not only working on the car, but also constantly giving each other support. Al doesn't say much, nor interfere with the way others race their cars, but you can count on Al's help whenever you ask for it.*

Dave Campos owns the World Motorcycle Record at 322mph and remembered Al's first year out with the Spirit of 76:

"In 1976 we took the Jammer bike to the salt to start shake out the bugs. Al Teague was there with his new lakester doing the same thing. Almost every time Al ran something would go wrong with his parachutes and he would have to use his brakes. The brake linings would get so hot that they would catch fire and MY pit crew would follow Al down the track with MY extinguisher to put out the fire leaving me to wait alone after a run until they were satisfied Al was out of danger. Al is always there to help you in any way and it was great to be able to help him out for a change."

Dave Dahlgren is a crack engine builder and tuner remembered:

A guy brought his son out to the salt for the first time from Missouri who was a big Al Teague fan. We happened to cross paths and I asked Al if we could take a picture of him and the kid next to the streamliner. Al says, "Sure, but we'll do better than that" and puts the kid in the car for a picture. That boy was overwhelmed. I cannot think of any other place in motor racing when something like this would happen. Children have lots of hero's but most of those hero's never actually take the time acknowledge their fans, especially the kids."

Racer and photographer Will Scott noted: *"Easily, Al has to be one of the most patient, humble, focused and accomplished backyard racer the world has ever*

known. Al always finds the time to spend with another member of the human race - whether that is another racer, fan or just another person in life. I've seen him calmly share himself with people after all night thrashes, immediately before and after 400 mph runs (hell, he'd probably be available during one if anyone could keep up with him) he is truly a man of the people."

Owner of ERC Racing Fuels Rick Gold has had the opportunity of observing the Teague operation on the salt for 12 years, he concluded: *"The sheer number of good, solid runs that Al made down the salt always hugely impressed me. It struck me that you very rarely saw Al abort a run. In my opinion, this spoke to his core competence as a racer."*

These speed folks like to hang up pictures of their heroes everywhere. The speed machine is a treasured icon, just as precious as a wedding photo, or of a grandchild or parent. One such wall was built in the 1800's as dairy farmers home in the south of England. Today is a comfortable manor house for a middle-aged man and his family who all cheer for Al Teague.

Richard Noble, O.B.E., is a World Land Speed Champion who in 1983 drove a jet powered car 633mph and most recently, as the owner of ThrustSSC, obliterated the sound barrier on land at 763 mph making it the fastest automobile on earth. Richard told me:

"It was 1991 and I was on Bonneville for Speedweek to watch Art Arfons who was campaigning the last Green Monster for an attack on my record. You tend to feel extraordinarily vulnerable if your hard-fought-for record is under threat and like me, you knew very few people from the wheel driven community. Al made me welcome in his pit area explained the huge, life-long battle he had been fighting with the Speed-o-Motive car to try to set a world record.

In my study, hanging just above a photo of ThrustSSC is a photo from Al. It is a picture of Speed-o-Motive, alone on the salt. On it Al wrote:

To Richard,
Best wishes on your new project.
Al Teague
432mph Bonneville 91

It tells you everything about Al.