Back in 1935, the biggest hurdle to the late Sir Malcolm Campbell's 300MPH World Land Speed Record was convincing the celebrated British auto racer to abandon the glorious shore of Daytona Beach for the inhospitable landlocked and virtually unknown Bonneville Salt Flats.

Thank speedster Ab Jenkins for his unwavering persistence and fine film footage – he was Bonneville's self-appointed PR man who, more than anyone else, was responsible for not only enticing Campbell, but also John Cobb and Sir George Eyston to seek speed out on the ancient dried-up seabed. Jenkins knew the salt's potential; he had repeatedly experienced it first-hand setting numerous world endurance records, some of which – remarkably - still stand today.

Back then, the British trio not only had horsepower galore, more importantly they had salt – miles and miles of it. They could zoom up and back to their English heart's content until they ran out of parts, fuel, or interest.

Today, speed is held hostage by tires and miles. Not only do the land speed folks who manage to lure the horsepower genie out of various powerplants have to equip the vehicle right now.

Duncan added that the base equipment would run several hundred thousand dollars and then each size would require additional capital expenditure upwards of $80,000. No big deal for mighty conglomerates, but an enormous burden for a family-owned and operated company.

Now for the miles…, I predict we will see the barrier fall in 2006 if the salt yields enough hard miles for the speed machines to now only “Go,” but “Whoa” as the late Don Vesco would say about his axial horsepower.

Montana-based Betty, Gene and Tom Burkland are currently the only folks with a platform large enough to carry the 500MPH threshold. For 100MPH less is the Nish Motorsports white streamliner has already turned a 409MPH run and a 2004 parachute test yielding a 417MPH class record. Looking at the 411's Dreamcycle orange and axial horsepower.

In my opinion, these folks represent American ingenuity at its best. If you consider the 411’s performance is contingent on track conditions, Burkland hopes to make at least one run during August's SCTA/BNI Speedweek to take a shot at the Top Time Trophy, or perhaps bump his class record. If those 13 miles materialize then the team would refocus to make a pair of BNI International runs and set a World Record. If you consider that the last time out with the car Tom experienced a good bit of wheel spin yet only used 72% throttle going through the terminal trap then you realize 500MPH is very, very possible.

“We have a more conservative approach with the car after spending three years to make it capable of what it can do,” concluded Burkland who now has so much available power that he has to manage it all the way down the course, “We don't have control over the environmental concerns, so unless we are sure the track is able to give us a return for our investment, we’ll keep the car at home.”

BEYOND GOLDENROD

It is a well-known that Bill Summers sold the Goldenrod to the Henry Ford Museum. Respected land speed racer, 200MPH Club member and auto journalist John Baechtel is nearly finished with refurbishing the historic speed machine in southern California. Chrysler has provided four crate engines and the target for completion is Memorial Day.

Some folks thought the car should never have been touched, but it was “save it now, or watch it disintegrate,” said Baechtel. “We're saving as much as possible, I'd say we will have at least 90 percent of
the original car when its done. It was the opportunity of a lifetime to be able to res- urrect a national treasure from a near death situation,” I asked Summers if he was involved in the restoration and got a completely surprising reply.

“It doesn’t interest me,” said Sum- mers, “The Goldenrod has been in my life so many years that its great to be free of worrying about it. The car is going to a great place, the best place in America - better than the Smithsonian. I’ve been going to the Ford Museum for decades and it always has the best stuff.”

Think about it from his perspective, transporting the car all over the world for 40 years had to be brimming with safety concerns – like a kid who grows up but doesn’t leave home for four decades. Yipes!

“I have wanted to build another car,” said Bill Summers, “For a long time I have felt that people did not appreciate my involvement with the Goldenrod. You hear it all the time…the crew members rarely get a pat on the back. Butch and I accept ing accolades and enjoying some time,” noted Bill, “Meeting our fans, talking to the other guys. For some reason Dawsen never gave me much respect. Right after we set the 409MPH world record in November of ’66, we all went to dinner that night at the steak house in nearby Wendover. Everyone was excited and in a good mood. I’ll never forget when Dawsen stood up and toasted Bob, ignoring me completely. My brother never said a word and while he was never a confrontational guy, it still hurt me deeply that Butch let it go. We were the Summers Brothers after all.”

Bill realized after that episode that it was up to him to include himself in any future recognition. That became easy once they started touring the car at auto shows – New York, Chicago, Boston et al. Bill made it a point to attend at every opportu nity while Bob never really cared about going out with the car and made only the occasional appearance concentrating instead on his speed parts manufacturing business.

“I think he missed out on a great time,” noted Bill, “Meeting our fans, accepting accolades and enjoying some media attention. It was fun. I tried to encourage Butch to go, but his appearances were few and far between. I wanted to go drag racing, but he wasn’t interested, all he wanted to do was make parts.”

Bill had sold his interest in the parts company to Butch in 1988, but when Butch died in December 1992 it was the real end of the “Summers Brothers.” The Goldenrod remained part of his daily thoughts, conversing with people about it all the time and he told me that in hindsight that if he were building the streamliner today that he would “build it much differently.”

What would he put together? “I want to build a wheel-driven car that will exceed 500 miles per hour,” Summers said without a moment’s hesitation. “Exactly what kind of car it will be depends on the sponsors, where the money comes from. NASCAR figured that out, so did Mickey Thompson, but land-speed racers don’t think that way. I am looking for somebody who all their life has wanted to go fast and thought, ‘I want to build a fast car, I have the money, but I don’t have the experience and the knowledge’ - I am trying to find that guy.”

Acknowledging that the TEAM-Vesco Turbinator holds the record at 468MPH and that using a turbine engine was the ultimate way to set the record, Summers thinks he could get the job done with two or three big HP engines, or even 4 normally aspirated units – just like before. I told Summers that I believe Richard Noble of ThrustSSC fame is thinking of contesting the wheel-driven record with diesels, using some virgin money from across the pond.

“I am sure it can be done,” admitted Summers, “In Europe, with all the emphasis on diesel technology, Noble would have a good chance. I’d prefer using a pair of 600CID Chrysler Hemis with roots blowers driven off the crankshaft. Those engines put out an easy 2,000HP each – more than enough to get the job done. I could also use four Chevy Big blocks, or even 25 Yamaha YZ250 motorcycle engines – why not? It would be hard, but it would be fun.”

And the aerodynamics? “The design would be almost identical to the Golden- rod, which has a proven, slippery and effective shape,” he revealed, “We would not need to do as much wind tunnel test- ing, but I’d definitely get rid of those pods on the side of the body that cover the hubs to make it much more streamlined. The car I want to build is the evolution of the Goldenrod, but a lot less complicated mechanically. The driver’s position and controls are critical, just like steering and you have to be smart about the cooling system. A big part is the drivetrain and getting the horsepower to the wheels. We may not need pneumatic tires, aluminum wheels might be the way to go.”

Summers worked up a budget and he figures it will take a million dollars to fund his idea. “I am one of the few people in the world who knows how to do this,” he stated confidently, “There is no one else in the history of the sport who set a World Record the first year that they tried. I think we also need to have a woman driver as well as a man. I would love to invite Danica Patrick to drive, or closer to the sport, Pat Zimmerman would also be a great driver.”

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