



# Fuel For Thought

Landspeed Louise

## Society of Land Speed Racing Historians

First, it was the arts. Then music got it in the neck. Now, I understand that colleges are dumping history as part of their core academic program. Harvard is foremost among them. Damn. Three subjects close to my heart marginalized right before my eyes. Your eyes too because there will be less effort made to remember "from whence we came" and what we did.

You see, I am one of those people who believes that if we forget our history, we are doomed to repeat it. I am consumed with visual, conversational and social encounters that forge faceted interpretation and give rise to enthused expression. Some of those expressions emanate from a 5-octave voice and only one working ear.

When educators feel comfortable abandoning art, music and history, it's aggravating to me personally, yet the narrowing of the public consciousness has broader consequences. And what does all this ranting have to do with land speed racing? Ah, glad you asked.

Just like the racers who formed the 200 MPH Club because they figured the only way they would ever get any recognition for what they did out on the salt, was to acknowledge themselves. Another group of folks has had a similar epiphany, more precisely, they've had enough of land speed racing being forgotten, or marginalized to a footnote hither and yon.

The Society of Land Speed Racing Historians was formed to, "preserve the history and heritage of land speed and dry lakes racing, to promote the hot rodding culture and to work towards a permanent

*Society of* **LAND SPEED RACING HISTORIANS**

repository where artifacts can be safely kept and restored for future generations. Encourage historians, photographers and others to publish their books and photographs."

In other words, this is a grassroots group who does not want to see the pioneering documentation, photos and artifacts hit the nearest dumpster. There are no dues, duties or commitments. No one is paid. The group promotes members' works, whether they are text, photographic, art, events, or the building or restoring of vintage racing vehicles via a newsletter.

There is a fearless leader called "President" but better known as SCTA/

BNI tech inspector Jim Miller. Miller is also a talented art director who quit his 9-to-5 a few years back because it got in the way of his racing.

The only constant function of the group is the generation of a newsletter. The interim Editor is Richard Parks who also serves as Secretary. All three positions will be voted on annually. Yours truly designed the art that was adopted as the SLSRH logo.

No meetings have been held, but the hope is to gather monthly at a motorsports museum around Southern California to gain contacts and convince curators to assist in preserving the hot rodding and land speed history.

New members are coming aboard weekly, there are more than 60 at this writing, but among current ranks are LSR enthusiasts, racers and volunteers who share the common speed preservation bond. Among them are some recognizable names:

Glen Barrett, Warren Bullis, George Callaway, Ugo Fadini, Glenn Freudenberg, Don Garlits, Bruce Geisler, Andy Granatelli, Wendy Jeffries, Kay Kimes, Don McMeekin, Tom Medley, Don Montgomery, Bob Morton, Paula Murphy, Frank Oddo, David Parks, Richard Parks, Wally Parks (in memoriam), Eric Rickman, Ed Safarik, Al Teague, JD Tone, Randy and his grouchy dad Jim Travis.

Newsletter Editor Parks' recent commentary gives everyone a good sense of what the group is trying to achieve. He also is good at tamping down baloney, bad-mouthing and ego illusions that often populate on-line chat rooms. Here is an example of his prose:

"Since hot rodding and land speed racing are so closely intertwined as to be nearly impossible to separate, we have kept our group focused on these two subjects. But we realize that many hot rodders left the lakes and went into oval track, boat racing and other forms of motorsports.

These forms of racing often have their own museums and memberships, but land speed racing and hot rodding do not have a lot of museums and research sites at their disposal. The combined numbers of amateur hot rodders and land speed racers far outnumber all other types of motorized racing, although the hot rodders were not always racers.

Many fine museums have set aside areas to display hot rodding and land speed exhibits. The problem is that the total amount of artifacts that we can potentially donate to any one museum is

nearly limitless, while the space available is tiny.

Many hot rodders and land speed racers have no place to donate their collections and much of our valuable heritage is lost to the garbage dumps as heirs who have no interest in our hobbies, dispose of what they inherit."

If you are in sympathy with the ideals of the Society of Land Speed Racing Historians, it's easy to join. Simply send a note to Editor Parks at [rnparks2@juno.com](mailto:rnparks2@juno.com) asking him to please add you to the membership list. There is no cost or requirement to join, except a fervent desire to save, record and restore our heritage.

Members are encouraged to tape those still living from the early days of hot rodding and land speed racing. Other than that, members are not under any obligation other than what they chose to do.

By the time you read this, there will be nearly 50 newsletters published and distributed via email and on the web. Interested? You can take a peek at any of the newsletters by logging onto my website: [www.landspeedproductions.biz/](http://www.landspeedproductions.biz/) and clicking on the SLSRH logo at the bottom of the home page.

Among some of the more interesting items contained in the newsletter were a few notices of upcoming land speed events. One that got a lot of attention was:

"A quite informal 10th anniversary celebration of the supersonic land speed record set by ThrustSSC is planned for Gerlach, Nevada. The official anniversary is Monday, October 15, but some folks plan to arrive as early as the 13th and stay. A number of ThrustSSC team members and supporters plan to come from the U.K. A barbecue is planned and probably a little lie-swapping and drinking at the Miner's Club bar."

I was on the dirt with the FossettLSR team photographing the car for posterity the same weekend the Thrusters showed up, along with a test session by the North American Eagle. There were a lot of enthusiasts that just showed up and joined in the merry making due to the advance notice.

The newsletter was also a great repository for heartfelt expressions when Wally Parks passed away unexpectedly. You could tell it was healing. Comments came in from dozens of racers, fans, speed equipment honchos, publishers, and friends. It was obvious Wally's life had made an indelible impression on umpteen folks – a great many with something poignant to say or, with a great back-story

that characterized the great man in a wealth of ways. Some just wanted to express their sympathies.

Later Evelyn and Bill Junge told us about Stan Chersky who has a scrap yard close to Ken Black's in Lynwood, California. Stan started saving car club plaques from the scrap heap years ago and now has over 4000 car club plaques, which he believes is the largest or the second largest collection in the world. The Junge's then offered to contact Stan about a private tour.

President Miller, who always comes up with some great historical stuff and a few dandy photos as well, recounted some thrilling days that included hot rod Lincolns with his "From the Salt to the Carrera Panamerica"

The year is 1952. Benson Ford (yes that Ford) calls a man who started his racing career at Muroc in 1937. That man was Bill Stroppe. Seems Ford had the '53 Lincoln prototype hidden away in Colorado and wanted to see if it could cut the mustard in the up-coming Carrera Panamerica in Mexico.

Bill and his buddy Clay Smith jumped a plane to get the car and do a little road test on the way back to his shop in Long Beach. They were cruising along and had this brilliant idea. How about a stop at Bonneville to see what she would do. The engine wasn't in the best of shape after the thrashing it got at Pikes Peak so they did a Banzai run to the shop bypassing the salt.

Once there, they literally did an all-nighter and rebuilt the engine including a valve job then took off again for Bonneville. Back on the salt they tried out the 10-mile circle used for endurance runs and were blown away as the big Lincoln cruised along at 118 mph, which was good news to Ford who decided to field a team of Lincolns for the '52 race with Stroppe as the constructor and team manager.

Stroppe's Lincoln's dominated the Carrera's large stock car class from '52 till its end in '55. In '53, he even helped out his old dry lakes buddy, Ak Miller with his "Iron horse." Seems the Lincoln's rims fitted with special Firestone tires bolted right on Ak's '49 Ford chassied hot rod. The combo was good enough for eighth overall.

In the early years Bill hired many dry lakes notables for his Lincoln team. Among them were Jack McGrath, Mickey Thompson, Manny Ayulo and Chuck Daigh who drove in '52 and '53 and prepped the cars in '54 after Clay Smith was killed.

All of these gentlemen graduated

from dry lakes racing like Bill Stroppe did. The Bill Stroppe & Sackett Special entry is seen at the Muroc Time Trials on May 16, 1937. The car was powered by a S.R. Fronty and ran 90.91 mph with Bill Stroppe at the wheel. Bill went on to fame in the racing game after WWII."

I really enjoyed that tale, it helped thread together many stories I had heard about all the aforementioned gentlemen. The newsletter is immensely valuable and its worth will rise and fall depending on how members choose to contribute to the written word.

It ought to be noted that it is not required to be a professional writer, photographer, curator or trained historian – as Parks aptly put it -- "only a fervent desire to save, record"

Harvard ought to hire Parks. We could use a lot more historians and lot less lawyers. 

*Note:* Photojournalist Louise Ann Noeth is the authoress of the award-winning book, "Bonneville: The Fastest Place on Earth," a complete historical review of the first 50 years of land speed racing now in its 7th printing. For more details and to order, go to: [www.landspeedproductions.biz](http://www.landspeedproductions.biz).

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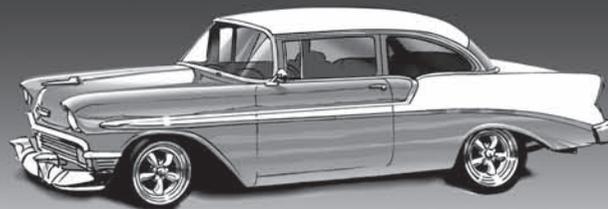
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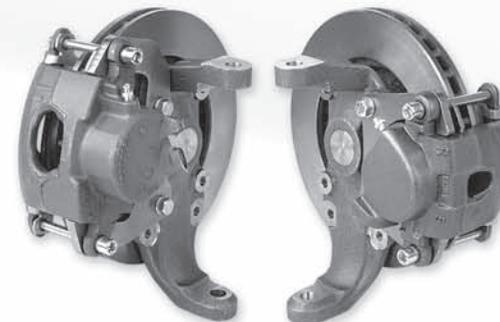
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