



Fuel For Thought

with "Landspeed Louise" Ann Noeth

World Land Speed Racers To Get Some Respect

SCTA/BNI Poised To Replace FIA As World Record Authority

With a vote long overdue, the courageous current board members of the Bonneville Nationals Inc., the salty arm of the Southern California Timing Association (SCTA) unanimously resolved to step-up and confront the FIA for world sanctioning rights at the Bonneville Salt Flats.

After years of getting the great almighty snub from the unbelievably unresponsive, insensitive and thoughtless FIA, land speed racers will finally be rid of the sanctioning millstone when they wish to achieve world bragging rights. As I have written before, so I say again: when it comes to chronicling modern day achievements of land speed racing the FIA are bumbling idiots at least, or arrogant brats at best. For years the inept record keeping of the FIA has denied numerous land speed racers public recognition for their high-speed driving achievements. The FIA demands money in advance, but has rarely delivered anything in a timely fashion. As of early October, as I write this column, the FIA website's World Records listings is still riddled with errors and omissions – all of them from Bonneville and all but one set by Americans.

For example: For decades the 409MPH achievement of Bill and the late Bob Summer's Goldenrod record has been misclassified in the supercharged category, when anyone involved with the sport knows the streamliner had four naturally aspirated Hemis. Among the other slighted speedsters are Rick White, Harry Hoff-

man, Jr., Mark Lingua, John Baechtel, Keith and James Burkdoll, Jim Feuling and Charlie Markley.

We attempted to contact BNI Chairman Roy Creel, but the dedicated speed official was already on his way to the salt, a week in advance, preparing for the World Finals when this column was penned. We managed to hook up with board members Mike Cook, Fred Dannenfelzer and Mike Waters to get their views on this first fundamental step in correcting a simply awful and frustrating situation. "Personally, I feel the racers running the high speeds need more attention," explained Mike Cook, who also currently serves as the SCTA President, "The FIA shows no interest in the present day efforts of the land speed racer. It is our wish to honor their efforts. To recognize the enormous energy expended to make a world land speed record attempt." Cook pointed out that the BNI actions are to benefit racers on an international basis and not just to help Americans. "The BNI invites all racers from all countries with open arms. It is our intention to make them feel welcome, to show them the respect that has been lacking from the FIA for years and years."

The SCTA/BNI board has wisely decided to emulate the same exacting rules and regulations required by the FIA and will issue the BNI International Certificates to those successful in their speed attempts. "We will be running on FIA records and using FIA regulations, including the two-way runs," noted Cook. "Using the same rules not only builds credibility, but also is a dignified way to show homage to all the land speed racers who have labored through the exasperating FIA process. It is fair to say that with the FIA, the actual speed runs were the EASIEST part of the world record setting process.

"We have been talking about doing this for years," added 'Fast' Fred Dannenfelzer, "The FIA doesn't care about land speed racing. It was time to do something about it. After all, we are the reputable timing body whose volunteers carry out all the work any-

way, so why bother to involve the FIA anymore? We don't expect any problems at all in taking over the administration over world record attempts."

Dannenfelzer was referring to the fact that SCTA/BNI has always prepared the course, arranged for the survey, supplied the timing lights, clocks, timers, course workers, safety people and medical staff. All the FIA ever did was send a single person that merely observes the speed runs – nothing more. Further, it is the SCTA/BNI technical staff that actually measures the engine while the FIA observer only watches.

"We won't refuse any racer who comes to us and wants to run under FIA sanction, but the racer will have to make all the arrangements on their own from now on, concluded Dannenfelzer, "BNI International intends to demonstrate that we can run a world record event with the same high level of oversight and safety as any of the road race guys that showed up in the past." He was referring to the SCCA stewards who had been appointed observers by the FIA in past years. BNI board member Mike Waters weighed in, adding that the BNI International will only run those vehicles that are qualified to run against existing FIA world records and that the group will emulate the FIA requirements so that the runs are a mirror image. Also a key point that racers should not forget: If no one pre registers a vehicle for the BNI International in advance, then the BNI will not go to the trouble to prepare a longer course, especially when weather and geological conditions don't warrant organizing a longer course. "We reserve the right to decide if the vehicle is a viable entry to run against an existing FIA record," he cautioned, "The car and the driver has to prove itself, just like any other entry. Although we are no longer going to offer FIA sanctioning, we also won't object to it, but now it is up to the racer to obtain the sanction."

What this means is that the world bragging rights will now be certified by BNI. The group has worked out a fair and equitable solution that not only fixes the long-standing, repetitive problems caused by the FIA, but at the same time allows for a dignified departure that honors the hard-won accomplishments of all those land speed racers that already own an FIA certified record. "We got stuck in the middle," said Waters, "Competitors would complain to us about legitimate problems and we had no one to complain to because no one at the FIA ever responded. We will leave it to the world to decide if we, the BNI are credible enough to issue world record certificates."

So what do the racers think of this idea? Current holder of several FIA and BNI International world records Al Teague commented briefly on the change pointing out: "We've tried this before, with the Land Speed Authority (LSA). We'll have to let it play out and see how it goes. If the BNI can hold onto a certain amount of authority, and I think they can,

that would be great. The big test will come when the next board takes over and then we'll see if they stick with it."

Teague has no doubts that BNI can conduct a full program according to the FIA rules, but insisted the key will be in sustaining the two-way runs over 60 minutes. That point always presents a high hurdle to clear because there isn't always enough usable, safe salt to make a proper approach to the timed mile, and/or have enough real estate left over to stop safely after blasting through the timing lights. "Being timed over the same mile is also very important," noted the highly respected racing sage, "those up and down runs hampered many attempts in the past. It was the hardest thing for us to do when we set the 409 record,"

Don Alexander, also a FIA and BNI International record holder recalled when he set his records with a diesel powered pickup, the FIA observer had no technical knowledge about diesels. As for the two-way runs, Alexander believes there is room for change: "From a safety standpoint if the salt doesn't hold up, then its no love lost if the pair of runs are both in the same direction. When I was kid, reading about the great cars and drivers all the runs were two ways, but that goes back to a time when technology wasn't as good, the cars were not as fast and the salt was much bigger." Alexander who has held an FIA driving license throughout his racing career, considers his FIA record somewhat special in terms of tradition, but doesn't believe the record set at Bonneville was not made anymore special because it was an FIA sanction. "I support what the BNI is trying to do because it is better for the racers," he stated, "It's such a joke to think the FIA has a lock on world records. Just having a Bonneville record of any kind is more important than whether it's FIA because Bonneville is such a very special place. One of things that make it special is the people who officiate and volunteer each year to stage an event. Without them, it could not happen. The most important thing is earning the record and not who certifies it. What does it add to have the record validated by a difficult group of people thousands of miles away?"

All this angst could have – should have – been avoided if only the FIA had done the job it was hired to do, paid in advance to do and by its own lofty "International Sporting Code" promised to do. In my opinion, the FIA has not only breached its own, self-proclaimed contract, but is guilty of outright fraud. The FIA has ripped off the land speed racing community. The FIA has taken money warranting that it will perform a duty, but has repeatedly vanished across the Atlantic like a common two-bit criminal. If this lack of integrity doesn't bother them then land speed racing is better off without them. I salute the courage of the SCTA/BNI and encourage future officials to shepherd this significant step forward on their watches to come. 📷

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