By the time you read this column I will have filed my 2,000 mile "change of address" with the US Postal Service asking them to please forward everything to my new digs near Saint Louis, Missouri. Hubby's employer made him a relocation offer that simply couldn't be refused and we abandoned California for some Midwest living. Born and raised in Chicago, a return to a four-season climate is actually welcomed after nearly 30 years of coastal residency.

I'm looking forward to the adventure, delighted to be back in a greener locale with an abundance of flora and fauna. As a long-time Cub Bleacher Bum, the only down side thus far is being surrounded by Cardinal fans.

Trying to explain the impending misery to my British-born husband was rather useless since I gave up on professional sports years ago when strikes, salary spats and ticket prices got plain stupid.

That's the odd thing, I still don't care about pro sports stuff, but the idea of attending a Cub's game at Busch Stadium near the famous arch is tantalizing, especially if I get a local fan to pony up for the tickets. I already have an idea for some antagonizing tee shirt artwork.

Zooming around with the top down on the Corvette will be restricted by snow and rain a bit more, but the C6 does have heated seats, which certainly will get used more. I'm also hoping to find a local kid desirous of fast cash in exchange for keeping the ride tidy.

While farther from Bonneville, I'll be closer to the ECTA events, so maybe a road trip to Maxton will be in the cards now. It would be wonderful to see how the concrete crowd spits out its speed at a mere 210 feet above sea level versus Bonneville's 4,200 feet, or Goliad's measly 164 foot altitude.

As for all you Midwest land speed junkies, I expect to hear from you – where you are, what you are doing, what you are dreaming to do and when you are doing it. I might even visit because my nationalized citizen needs exposure to the real deal America, not just the California life of fruits and nuts.

Female Car Designers Needed

I recently lunched with three highly respected auto designers turned educators who were in LA to speak to the Motor Press Guild about the inside world of the automotive industry at its roots, where the industry gets its style. I've known plenty of students and have never met one that didn't have a racecar in their portfolio.

During the lengthy Q&A session it was revealed that more female students were being sought, that the profession was in serious need of more gals to enroll and not just to puff up the demographic numbers. I spent time with each to get more facts.

They are: Tom Matano, Executive Director School of Industrial Design, Academy of Art University San Francisco; Stewart Reed, Transportation Design Department Chair, Art Center College of Design; Mark West, Interim Transportation Department Chair at the College for Creative Studies.

"Their point of view is different, we have a real need for the female perspective in automotive design," said Matano when I quizzed him, "We get so few women to begin with, but they rarely survive the course because they end up going into another direction of industrial design."

Matano confessed he personally became educated through clients and friends who pointed out that some of his "great design ideas" were disaster for half the customers who purchase automobiles.

"I found a deep-weave, highly textured fabric for seating," he explained, "A lady friend pointed out the women would hate it because if they sat on it for any length of time, especially in shorts, the fabric pattern would transfer onto skin at backs of their thighs."

Another time he thought a new, grippy fabric would be perfect for a sports car, but he fast discovered women wearing skirts or dresses hated it because how the clothes would stay in the seat when they tried to get out.

Then an automaker client pointed out the error of having the only key access on a minivan at the driver's door. "It's the women who usually need to open the sliding side door, or rear hatch first, because they had armfuls of kids and groceries to load," Matano said, "Guys don't think about those things."

"That woke me up," he revealed, "I don't agree with the idea of female cars from female designers, but do want to nurture females into the industry. Chrysler agrees with me and has provided scholarship for strong female design candidates."

Art Centers Stewart Reed agreed, "We need female viewpoints. Many of our design study clients specifically ask that women be considered in the study." Reed is guiding a fascinating project sponsored by the Indy Car Racing League that asks "what does the race track of the future look like?" Transportation design student Kimberly Wu, 23, was one of two undergraduate women selected for the three-month project and said she has already learned how to balance teammates' different ideas.

Hailing from a variety of disciplines - including transportation design, product design, environmental design, photography and graphic design - the students will design not only a race car, but also the Indianapolis Motor Speedway's future appearance and online multimedia.

"Their work is expected to address the total Indy 500 experience," said Reed, who is leading the IndyCar 2011 project, "A single-seater open-wheel race car is the most pure, fundamental expression of a human and a machine."

Hmmm... sounds a lot like a roadster, or lakerst to me folks.

"It's alarming when I read articles that say the automotive industry isn't for women," noted Mark West, "Many women in the business are very successful, their careers are really going places, so I think we need to do a better job of attracting women to the field of study."

West said that the school's PR people are targeting female-oriented magazines to attract women. In addition, the school as well as private patrons have set up scholarships specifically reserved for use by female students.

"We not only want to attract the female student, we want to keep them as well," he added, "The automotive industry is begging for female designers, especially interior design to address the needs and wants of customers. It takes a strong woman to go through the program. We have a lot of gearhead guys, we sure could use a few more gearhead females."

Ladies, sounds like the welcome mat is seriously out, are you ready to step up?

Check out the schools at: www.academyart.edu/industrial www.collegeforcreativestudies.edu www.artcener.edu www.artcener.edu www.academyart.edu/industrial design-school www.academyart.edu/industrial design-school or contact any of the three gentlemen and tell 'em LandSpeed Louise sent ya.

V-Dub Velocity

I confess to being dazzled by those intoxicatingly fast streamliners just as so many others have. Like a moth seeking a light source, or a magnet drawing metal to itself, I am undeniably bewitched by these slaves to aerodynamic propriety yet don't apologize for feeding the passion.

My admission is particularly directed to those for whom horsepower will never see three digits, those "mighty minis" who seek to extract the maximum out of the minimum and pummel brain cells in order to find a faster way.

The folks who race Volkswagen Beetles are a prime example. The 2008 National 36HP Land Speed Challenge was organized to encourage folks to take their vintage 36-horse engine-powered Volkswagen Beetle land speed racing and find out how fast it might go.

Designed originally to go 68 miles per hour in 1954, these mighty little engines have since taken the Beetle to speeds in excess of 100 miles per hour in modified form and powered all out race cars above 129 miles per hour.

Now in its fourth year, the 36hp Challenge is gathering steam, with interest from around the world, interest in challenging those record speeds set back when the 36hp engine was young, records which to this day have never been exceeded. Therein lies the challenge.

Increased recognition is on deck from two of the three American sanctioning bodies, ECTA and USFRA. Bug challengers will get their own official record classes (and bug specific safety rules) in the East Coast Timing Association events this year.

You’ll find direct 36hp Challenge information and photos on the Utah Salt Flats Racing Association website, www.saltflats.com, for those wishing to race on the historic Bonneville Salt Flats of Utah in the USFRAs exclusive 130 Mile Per Hour Club category.

Exceeding 70MPH might just be bone stock Beetle Nirvana this racing season. Supercharged Beetles vie to better Dick Beiths 1961 record. Others seek to out pedal Melvin Ellis’s 1962 record. Techies are after Tom Bruch’s turbocharged record of 83.091 mile per hour.

The oldest record on the books dates back to 1960. A 1956 Beetle averaged 77.107 mph on the salt using a dual-carb setup on its 1192cc engine. Come now, we certainly can do better than that, can’t we?

The way I see it, if Ron Main made a flathead run at plus 300, a bunch of flash-
light batteries electrically propelled Pat Rummerfield past 250 and street bikes zipping along at 175 or more, I fully expect the dual-carb Beetle brainiacs to pass 100MPH and the supercharged folks to smash through 150MPH in the not too distant future.

Among the guidelines racers will find many opportunities to eek out speed in four major categories: Stone Stock, Dual Super Stock, K36, NA36, or New Age. Any year Type 111/113/133 stock Volkswagen Beetle, Super Beetle or Cal Look sedan body are welcome. Convertible and sliding cloth sunroof bodies require added safety equipment. The vehicle condition must be overall sound and safe, as well as licensed and insured for street operation.

Although you may only want to compete in the 36HP Challenge, racers will also be required to meet all safety rules and pay all sanctioning body membership and/or entry fees. For what you get to do, the costs are surprisingly low.

There are eight scheduled gatherings of the 36HP faithful in 2008. The first is April 5th and 6th in conjunction with the ECTA at its one mile standing start time trial in Maxton, NC, followed by four more: May 17-18, June 28-29, September 27-28 and October 25-26.

The TEXAS MILE will also host all 36HP Challenge cars at its one mile standing start time trial at Goiàd AFB March 29-30. For info visit www.info@nasatx.com.

For those seeking speed on salt, September 17-20 will be their time when World of Speed hosts the one-mile standing start time trial on the short course along with unlimited top speed streamliners on the long course at the Bonneville Salt Flats near Wendover, Utah.

My friend and colleague Burly Burlile, is at the heart of this wild 36 HP scheme. I became acquainted with him more than a decade ago when he generously provided some of his wonderful photography for my Bonneville Salt Flats history book. If you are inspired to take up the challenge, feel free to contact him through his website - www.burlyb.com.