On my way back to St. Louis from Speedweek last year I stopped to visit the United States Air Force Academy (USAF) in Colorado Springs. A military college, it is to the Air Force what West Point is to the Army and Annapolis is to the Navy – where tomorrow’s leaders are trained, inspired and educated today.

This was no tourist stop; there was land speed racing business that needed tending. Years back, I had inked a deal with the Academy to provide real-world brain tickling projects for the cadet student body while helping Steve Fossett’s Project 800 World Land Speed Record team.

The team needed help with the wheels, sorting out pesky finite elements analysis (FEA) and computational fluid dynamics (CFD) with a trip or two in the supersonic wind tunnels. Yeah, they’ve got more than one.

The actual run data was to be shared with the USAFA faculty to create enticing engineering lessons for future classes keeping our project vital and relevant long after the car was collecting dust in a museum.

At least that was the plan. Then Steve took off one morning from Baron Hilton’s Flying M Ranch and never came back. Hopes and dreams were dashed. I needed to find out if the partnership idea still resonated with the new faculty, so I made a right turn off I-80 at I-25 and headed south.

There I met with Applied Mechanics Lab Director Lt. Col. Richard Buckley who set aside an entire morning to personally give me a campus walking tour. I discovered the guy is a proper motor head underneath his cool blue uniform that elicited salutes wherever we went.

The afternoon was spent with his “number 2”, Captain Robert Bailey, Deputy Lab Director, who covered the engine test cell area, the lab’s race shop and finished with the supersonic wind tunnels.

I got to start a Mach 2 test that put an exquisite vibratory hum into the thick concrete floor as the screaming psi whistled up from the six massive storage tanks below and into the tunnel where a visiting professor was essentially “tuning” the thing. Can you see me grinning like a fool even now thinking about it?

In the end, it was clear that everyone I met was either an existing, or new fan of land speed racing with special emphasis on the exploits of Bonneville racers. After all, Bonneville is just a big lab where research, development, testing and evaluating happens every single run. How could they not love us?

Lt. Col Buckley and Capt. Bailey joined me in November hiking through the SEMA Show aisles to meet some high performance manufacturers and land speed racers whose vehicles were on display.

This happened through the courtesy of SEMA President Chris Kersting who also gave credentials to several cadets and hosted them all at the industry banquet. A most magnanimous gesture appreciated in so many ways. Thanks Chris.

I asked Vic Edelbrock to meet with us and good conversation ensued about how his company might work with the Academy. Ditto for Paul “Scooter” Brothers from Comp Performance Group, Cam Benty from Flowmaster and the Gurrola’s from GROWit, a rapid prototyping company.

At the TEAMvesco #444 streamliner display I explained the long family racing history and recent records achieved at Speedweek. We found Danny Thompson’s Bonneville Mustang, the ethanol record-setting speed machine owned by Hajek Motorsports, out in the front hall in the Ford display.

We met Dennis Yarni at his #909 Speed Nymph streamliner where the officers and cadets got an in-depth walk around the world’s fastest motorcycle. We saw video of the car screaming across the salt. The collective look of everyone I met was priceless.

Next, we stopped to see Amir Rosenbaum’s ultimate gas guzzler, the 415MPH Cadillac-powered Spectre “Speedliner”, sans body panels, the 38-ft long chassis still had a bit of salt here and there giving it a nice touch of speed authenticity.

Outside, we ran into Ed “Isky” Iskenderian while getting the royal treatment from Rocky Robinson who had brought the world’s fastest motorcycle to the Las Vegas mechanical spectacular. Buckle and Bailey are both motorcycle riders and were particularly thrilled to shake hands with the fastest man on wheels.

Isky put the cap on that day with tales of speed pranks with his buddy, four-star general Curtis Lemay, the father of the Strategic Air Command and a founding member of the Air Force. Watching the “Camfather” casually explain how he and Curtis did this-and-that to two of the guys now training America’s next leaders and defenders was pioneer speed magic.

Now to the central point of this month’s column: Lt. Col. Buckley is interested in developing relationships that expand cadet educational opportunities with land speed racing teams.

At the Air Force’s sprawling campus in the mountains of Colorado Springs just south of Denver, Academy research labs are offering land speed racers access to highly technical engineering and science laboratories.

How? One way is through independent studies where cadets complete a project that is not structured around a textbook, or a formally taught course. The second is a Capstone Design Project where the cadet starts with a requirement, or two or three, and finishes with a working prototype. All partnership projects are conducted with serious faculty (read: super duper smart) oversight.

“Automotive-related projects are excellent for learning design, analysis and control of complex systems,” explained Lt. Col. Buckley, “If you want to get students interested and really learn something you have to get them excited. Learning systems engineering from a text book can be boring, but using a racecar to teach how systems work and interrelate, now that gets future fighter pilots excited.”

What this means to the land speed racer is the Academy can help design an entire vehicle, or just figure out why the heck that darn roadster keeps spinning out every time the speedo reads north of 200MPH.

Or maybe you are sneaking up a record, but need a little aerodynamic help to keep the car’s suspension planted. What about moving into the blown categories? Do you need some help sorting out the fuel delivery at various altitudes?

How about some weight and balance issues? Got some driveline chatter or vibration you haven’t been able to chase down?

How about traction issues? Think about getting access to a knowledge bank that makes it a priority to stay informed about the world’s BEST materials, associated stresses and load characteristics. Maybe you’d like to lighten up that behemoth without losing traction or stability?

“Aerodynamic issues are always being considered by land speed racers,” observed racer and Bonneville 200MPH Club President Dan Warner, “Packaging

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have a fully functioning classifieds site where you can buy and sell classic car related goodies to your hearts content (www.goodguysclassifieds.com). Then there is the Goodguys Forum (www.goodguysforum.com) where you can get online and discuss everything auto related with likeminded gearheads. Last, but certainly not least, is our pile of event-specific “micro sites”. There is one for each and every one of our events. You can find links to them at our main site (www.good-guys.com). There’s even one for Goodguys Autocross (www.goodguysaucrocors.com) with a list of the events that feature the coned courses as well as the minimal rules to keep you safe.

Goodguys is constantly trying to stay on the forefront of everything we’re involved in, whether it be putting on the best events around, creating the finest magazine money can buy or leading the way into the virtual hot rod world, so make sure to utilize everything we have to offer! [speedproductions.biz]

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are always having difficulty.”

The idea here is to HELP your racing program, not to take over, the partnering has to keep both sides smiling and engaged.

Early in 2011 I hope to ignite a healthy curiosity about straight-line speed deeds. Lt. Col. Buckley has invited me to give a presentation on land speed racing to the cadet student body.

As I see it, developing relationships with land speed racing teams will yield real world, practical data for cadet educational projects where once only theoretical, or computer-modeling data was possible. Equally important, the land speed racing teams will yield research instrumentation of a small-block Chevy engine.

Future planned projects include instrumented research engines and a 1000HP engine for demonstrations and cadet independent research.

The Aeronautical Engineering lab is equipped with several wind tunnels, ranging from low-speed sub-sonic, transonic, and supersonic up to Mach 4; jet engine test stands capable of measuring up to 7000lb of thrust, and several engine dyno caps of up to 1000 HP and 1000 HP.

Because USAFA is a federal agency, cadet design and research teams are not allowed to solicit sponsors from commercial businesses. This puts our future service members at a significant disadvantage compared to other universities. It also makes it more difficult for cadets to be involved with state of the art production development and research.

There is not a prohibition from working with the industry, just a prohibition from soliciting. This is where LandSpeed Productions comes in. My company will act as the conduit by which projects flow into the Academy's research labs and connect to our program students.

I look at this as a chance for land speed racing to make a patriotic difference and engaging young, eager minds to “spool up” to their potential. Land speed racers who are interested in collaborating can contact me via email: usafals@landspeedproductions.biz


After 11 years in print only a VERY limited number of the author's special autographed edition remain. For more details and to order, go to: www.landspeedproductions.biz.

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who were trying to fix the things gone wrong in their life by way of using a nine-sixteenths wrench, realizing the bolt and issue of life required a much larger size for repair. Abraham realized he couldn’t fix the problem he had on his own. Joseph couldn't do it either, and no matter what 'tool' he had, nothing was going to spring him from the prison he found himself in. Moses as well had his struggles. His own brother and sister turned against him at one point in his life, as they wanted to take over and be boss. Samson, even with his incredible physical strength, came to the realization that he needed more than that to combat Delilah’s cunning ways. Also in the Old Testament book of Psalms, we read about David who experienced days where no matter how many, or what “tools” he had, none would work to help repair the problems he was facing. While he experienced many good and wonderful days, he also slipped into the deep depths of being down and out! His own son even wanted to take his life, and then take over David's position and become King. In Psalm 3 David tells us a little about how he even despaired of life as he flew from his son Absalom. David wrote, “O Lord, I have so many enemies; so many are against me. So many are saying God will never rescue him!” However, it wasn’t long before David “picked up the right tool” and then wrote his words “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

Today, if you’re finding yourself discouraged for whatever reason, allow yourself to be encouraged with the truth of the Bible by way of another tool that is available to all. A trouble light! Psalm 119:105 reminds us that “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. The Right Tool for the Right Job!”

Are you interested in either sending your son/grandson, age 16 – 19 to a CRA Hot Rod Camp in ’11? Perhaps you would consider sponsoring a young guy? Call CRA for more info: CRA, PO Box 309, Valley Springs, CA 95252; 209-786-0524; cra@integrity.com.