



The Lady is a Leader

Walking along a deserted street in Hays, Kansas, an overnight rest stop on my way to Speedweek, I came upon Pastor Srock's choice for the 1st Baptist signboard with Poet Emerson's words: The task ahead of us is never as great as



the power behind us. They fit my state of mind and I could see how the words blended beautifully with acts of service, especially volunteer service.

I had been thinking about Miriam Macmillan, the bright rocketing personality that has been astonishing Southern California Timing Association officials, earning respect among her racing peers and generally devoting herself to the betterment of the sport for all comers.

It was Don Ferguson III (aka DIII) that lit the thought wick when he casually mentioned in earlier phone call that "she's going to be the first female SCTA President." What?! I knew the name, sort of knew the face and car, but could not recall meeting the lady and if I had, brain fade reigned.

DIII's words changed all that and suddenly MM from NZ was in my research radar crosshairs. This was big, this was unprecedented and this was land speed racing carving out a milestone in real time.

From its start in the late '20s the sport had always allowed women to labor for the speed cause, but they were forbidden for decades to take part in the joy of tripping the time clocks on the salty speedway, most any speedway for that matter. The fear (real or imagined) was that if a woman was hurt while racing a vehicle the entire sport would suffer. And if she were a mother? The terrifying

thought made men shudder, pitch up and shake their head with wincing eyes.

Yeah, ok, perhaps that may have been the parochial wisdom of yesterday, but I think the real reason was the guys were petrified of being slower than someone who wore more foundation garments they did.

Consider Lee Breedlove who drove her husband's Spirit of America – Sonic I jet car in 1965. Although Lee was quite the competent driver, held the required international licenses and had wanted to drive the jet for years, Goodyear and Shell had nixed it.

When the money men finally relented, Engineer Sheehan and Crew Chief Nye Frank (whom she who later marry) simply turned down the engine speed so that all Lee could average was 308.56 MPH on Nov 4, 1965.

"I would have liked to go faster and have a higher record, but the sponsors wouldn't allow it," said Lee (Breedlove) Frank recalling her salty jet rides.

Fast forward four decades to Miriam Macmillan is tracking towards the SCTA presidential role. Consider her prep work:

- Current SCTA Vice President
- 2012 BNI Chair (first woman)
- Save the Salt Advisory Board Member
- Rod Riders Racing Team Club President
- 2010 SCTA Points Champion
- Hondata part-time employee for hubby Doug
- Full-time "mom" of Alastair and Bridget

Oops, almost forgot..., she built her own Honda racecar in which she earned her 200MPH Club life membership at 204MPH – the first New Zealand woman to do so in history.

"Running at over 200mph is hard to describe, but I can tell you it is a real buzz," Miriam recalled, "You're out there on the big, wide-open salt flats, you build up to speed, and just hang in there hoping that nothing goes wrong!"

A multitasker if ever there was one, wouldn't you agree? No? Ask current SCTA president Bill Lattin about his VP, or go bug past President Don Ferguson who put me on this trail of feminine leadership intrigue. Or, any of the many volunteers who make land speed racing a dream come true for all of you with a speed need.

You'll find that Macmillan has devoted hundreds of hours and continues to perform a dizzying array of tasks with such grace, ease and proficiency that she is perfectly poised to become the August

group's first female leader.

Born in Christchurch, the 41-year-old Kiwi grew up in Whangarei where she attended St Joseph's Primary School and Pompellier College in Northland before a stint in the Royal New Zealand Air Force where she stayed three years (long enough to grow up, she says) learning discipline and how to study.

Bored with the military by age 20, she picked up an education degree Dunedin College of Education and began teaching computer science, english and precision target shooting (.022 rifle) at 23 to the all-boy student body. Somewhere in there she met and married Doug and started a family.

You can credit Miriam's mom and gram for her "can-do" deportment. Her grandmother raised five kids by herself, so this gal comes from a long line of strong women. On selecting classes mom said, "go find something you like, you can always pick-up typing if you need it," so she took technical drawing, developing skills that she finds especially helpful today for reading plans and understanding scale.

Dear darling Doug got Miriam fired up about the sport when his vehicle was protested at Bonneville. The gripe

resulted in competitors not being able to get back in the speed hunt before the meet was over, or to make corrections in time for the next meet, she figured the only way to change things was to get involved.

Later on, at the 200MPH Club banquet in 2007, she approached Dave Kirsch, then president of Rod Riders



involved the car's nose, so the couple had the original version shipped up to the salt overnight (big package at the front desk) and Doug then set a pair of records – 1 mile apart – one with each nose and let the SCTA choose which one it would accept.

"He was very upset and stressed out," explained the woman without a hobby of her own, "I became very territorial and protective."

Annoyed not by the protest itself, but the frustrating, protracted complaint process in place at the time that often

Racing Team Club, asking how she could become involved and the next thing you know she is the club secretary.

A couple of years later she started going to SCTA meetings when Don Ferguson III was elected VP of SCTA. According to Miriam, he asked her "out of the blue" to consider being SCTA secretary.

DIII was no dope, he had already recognized her for the organizational, detail-driven powerhouse she was who

Continued on Page 204

would simultaneously protect his political rear and both flanks in a racing organization that at times could pulsate with egomaniacal pomposity devoid of common-sense.

The lad understood the meaning of tactical; he knew this woman came prepared for everything she did. So began Macmillan's behind-the-scenes "education" of how things worked and who worked them.

Talk with her for a short time and you'll recognize she doesn't converse like someone with a hidden agenda. She decided long ago to "keep learning and not get bored" and it typifies everything she has done since.

Take the SCTA bylaws, long a mish-mash of type styles and sizes from years of appending. She took it upon herself to tidy up the governing statutes by putting them in a logical order, making them easy to read and understand and in the process became deeply familiar with the laws of the organization.

Recently, she rolled up several hundred miles on her personal transportation paying a visit to the SCTA office to meet with club media liaison and office manager JoAnn Carlson (Speed Note: Hooray to JoAnn! Elected into the 2012 Dry Lakes Racing Hall of Fame). Carlson noted Macmillan was only the second person from the SCTA to ever visit the office.

"If I am going to do something, it's all the way," Macmillan told me when I asked about the visit, "If I'm going to instruct staff then I have to know what JoAnn does and my visit taught a heck of lot. I gained lots of insight."

Uh huh. What if I tell you that in the middle of Miriam's 230MPH record run her side window blew out which she casually noted as an increase of fresh air but never lifted her foot off the throttle?

Insignificant to momentous, the lady knows how to prioritize. She left teaching because son Alistair, a bright but not well-organized student, needed some extra educational coaching. Once young Macmillan was recalibrated she eliminated bouts of stir-craziness by being useful at Hondata a couple days a week.

Hondata specializes in the modification and reprogramming of Honda and Acura engine control units (ECUs). Born out of a dream to marry cars and computers, when Doug Macmillan met Derek Stevens, the company was formed in New Zealand and then later relocated to the USA in 2000 where today it has a healthy customer base.

OK, OK, it's well known I am an outspoken advocate of women in motorsports so it's easy to wax philosophical about this maiden's milestone in LSR, but reflect on the practical things she's done. You'll find her fingerprints all over the Rookie orientation program and driver education process. She worked on

expanding into four race courses at Bonneville which resulted in significant "waiting-in-line" reductions. By focusing on how the speed meet itself was organized it was possible to streamline operations that increased the number of passes possible per meet.

She was right in the middle of altering "us/them" attitudes that existed between the motorcycle and car teams by tearing down the animosity walls of separation and bringing everyone into the same racing family, to be more inclusive not exclusive.

Remember folks, this is volunteer labor with emphasis on labor. Why drop yourself into the middle of such chaos I pondered? "I thoroughly enjoy myself most of the time," she replied quickly laughing, "leadership is making sure your people are looked after, making people happy and if they are not happy trying to find a way to make them happy, that's how you get things to run smoothly."

Looking forward she believes it is important to not only encourage new volunteers to come forward and get involved - however slightly - especially technical people, but to see that they are properly trained to provide relief to other volunteers.

"One person can't stay in the hot seat for too long," she observed, "We need to shift the responsibility to equally capable hands allowing people to have a break."

She also believes a better relationship with the local townspeople at the salt's edge is important and is looking into a scholarship targeted to both Wendover High Schools. Then there is the recycling program that would benefit other local school kids. The idea is the SCTA/BNI would furnish a special bag to all the racers for their recyclables. The youngsters could pick up the valuable discards from the designated dumpster area or go pit-to-pit collecting and meet some cool racers in the process.

"This will foster a good interaction between the racing community and the local community," she believes and intends on visiting Wendover in the near future to get the project rolling.

Is this woman daunted by anything? Nope. Fortunately, she came into the sport without social, technical, or political baggage.

"There is no absolute roadblock," she noted with a thoughtful, easy confidence, "some things just take longer to work through, to get past pre-conceive notions and attitudes. Communication is being able to recognize what people mean and not just what they are saying, to sit down and be willing to talk with people."

This all takes time and effort yet Macmillan astutely realizes that "everybody loves the racing, wants it to continue and in the best way possible, that everybody's bottom line."

Mercy, but she makes me so very proud to be a woman in motorsports.

Speed Note: In the January column I

misquoted Formula One Steward Garry Connelly which may have left readers with the impression he is paid for his duties. Not so. It is only his travel and accommodation expenses that the FIA picks up. He really did enjoy his salt experience and definitely will be back! My humble apologies to him for any discomfort my words may have caused him.

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. After 11 years in print, less than 12 of the author's special autographed edition remain. For more details and to order, go to: www.landspeedproductions.biz. 

Good Tips Continued from Page 180

cle. Alternator and AC compressor mount brackets come to mind as an example of this technique. Bellcranks for clutches and brake pedals are other examples where force must be transferred around a corner.

I remember years ago reading some comments by John Buttera, one of the all-time masters of fabrication and bracket design. The trick is to draw in the holes needed for the part to function and then draw the outside shape around that. He spoke of seeing the bracket in your head first, building it in cardboard or wood, and then being perfectly reconciled to throwing out your first design. It's probably true that if you never reject a first effort and do a redesign, you may be setting your sights a little low. For some of us, the coolest part of building a hot rod is figuring out a nifty bracket, especially one that serves several purposes. And isn't it fun to look a car over and appreciate another guy's talent and ingenuity! And, it is more about the man than the size of his wallet. Is this part of what makes Bonneville SO very special? 

Good News Continued from Page 202

from President Marc Meadors of Goodguys Rod & Custom Association during the Goodguys Ohio awards ceremony said are worth repeating. As the CRA Hot Rod Camp assembled vehicle was driven through the arena with the young men and instructors walking alongside (proud as if they themselves owned the fully-assembled street rod) that "It's time to get young guys out from behind their video games and computers, and into street rodding."

Winding up this Good News article seems best to quote the words of yet another camper who said "You really meant it when you said it's (CRA Hot Rod Camp) about us (the boys involved in the camp) and not the vehicle." While