

DLRA SPEEDWEEK

by Norm Hardinge



The 25th anniversary of Dry Lake Racing in Australia ... How cool is that! This is going to be big! I wonder if I tightened the wheel nuts on the trailer, bought the tent, spare tyres, turned off the stove, oh my god... the chips!

This was the stuff going through my head as the F-truck made its way along the 131 kilometres of red dirt, dodging kangaroos, emus and feral goats. In our small convoy of cars, on our way from Iron Knob to Lake Gairdner on the Big Knob Racing adventure this year, were Mat Lagoon and Neil Davis, and first timers Peter Leech, Jane Leech, Charlie Harris and my 14 year old grandson, Tyler. We were all very excited! The plan this year was to have Mat and Neil break two class records over 200mph and get their hands on one of those elusive red hats. It was suggested by Mat and Neil that I should do the shake down run just in case something fell off the race car, that gave me something else to think about on the road in.

On arrival at the salt we found the race track in perfect condition. We set up our pits, gave the Big Knob Racing '34 roadster the once over, then attended the drivers meeting along with 197 other entrants. We were informed that two tracks had been successfully set up, with timing on both. Track one was for vehicles over 175mph and track two for vehicles up to 175mph. Both tracks had hard, fast salt but on the edge of the lake the salt was a bit on the mushy side. Due to mechanical problems with our tow vehicle in Port Augusta, we had run out of time for that day's tech inspection so we headed for the salt bush camp on the lake's edge to pitch our tents in the red dust.

OK, so we're not campers and our experience in setting up tents is lacking somewhat, but at least we kept the other campers entertained. How were we to know that it only takes a couple of minutes to blow up an air mattress once you put the correct fitting on the pump!

Well and truly over the camping caper, it was off to the canteen for food and drink. Dion and the guys from Mildura Ice had taken on the huge task of catering for the event, and they did a great job! More importantly, they saved the Big Knob race team from having to eat their own cooking.

3am, tucked up in my sleeping bag, I was woken by the wind as the side of my poorly pegged down tent slapped me in the head. Now awake, being slapped in the head every three seconds, listening to the sound of light rain I was thinking the weather gods must hate salt lake racers.

In the morning the rain had gone but unfortunately the wind stayed around. We headed to the pits. DLRA

officials had laid a road of large plastic mats to help vehicles navigate onto the salt without breaking through the surface. We got into line for tech inspection and waited. Tech Inspector Bob Ellis and his crew were busy getting track two back in action after the rain. A couple of hours later, the racing started and Bob Ellis and his team returned to tech inspection.

Strong winds from the south persisted most of the day, so no records where being recorded. It was a good day for shake down runs and a good day for our poorly erected tents to be flattened. So it was a good night for setting up our tents again, then sitting at the canteen eating a big meal again, having a few drinks and catching up with some good mates. Some of these guys I only get to see once a year.

Day two of racing was promising. Still a southerly wind but nowhere near as strong, both tracks were open and records were there for the taking. Track two was deemed for motorbikes only when a race car sunk into the soft salt on the return road. It was 28 degrees, racing conditions were good, but unfortunately the afternoon saw two crashes, one with Lucky Keiser riding his motorcycle steamliner bike and the other Trent Clare driving the Clare family's American built streamliner.

The rest of the week saw morning temperatures of 10 degrees with a southerly wind, in other words, bloody cold - not the stinking hot Australian outback days that most people attending would expect. It was so cold that the DLRA merchandise stand sold out of club jackets and almost sold out of club windcheaters.

The entrance to the lake was softer than usual which was starting to be a problem. The entrance needed to be preserved to make sure all vehicles on the lake could get off the lake at the end of the week. Access was restricted to only essential vehicles and the Club Animal shuttle bus was used to ferry people to the pits and start line. This worked well preventing further problems. Race teams happily shared push cars and tender vehicles that were already on the lake to enable racing to continue.

The week's racing ended with 522 runs being recorded, sixteen 200 mph + records broken and another great event run by the DLRA volunteers. If you want more info on dry lake racing in Australia, visit www.dlra.org.au or come along to our next Speedweek event, February 29th until March 6th, 2016.

See you at the salt, Norm Hardinge.

Chris Roberts

Robbo's XP Falcon panel van is a vehicle any car guy would love to go cruising in. Chris Roberts put the car together five years ago with his good mates Nick and Chris Bown. The idea was to build a budget racer for Lake Gairdner were the main objective was to have a heap of fun.



The three guys took on the build and chose to do all of the bodywork, painting and mechanicals themselves. The running gear is a 250 2v Ford motor complete with second hand pistons and roller rockers, a homemade inlet manifold and exhaust headers. The Ford 6 cylinder is adapted to a T5 gearbox and an 8" diff. The car had a best speed at Speedweek 25 of 122mph. Robbo said they had a great time, even when they were stuck for five hours on the side of the road with a busted trailer, and are already planning for 130mph next year.



Al Scott & Ian Leslie

Al Fountain made the trip to Bonneville, USA in 2009 and ended up buying a record holding Studebaker Avante. The car runs a super reliable Nascar engine and at the time held a Bonneville class record at 214mph. On Al's return trip back to Australia, he was worried about being charged for excess baggage and so he left the Studebaker in the States and raced it at Bonneville Speedweek 2010.



Bob Bowman



Bob Bowman from Swan Bay NSW heads up Team Speed AKA Stan Racing. Made up of members of Rickshaws Hot Rod club, these guys have been coming to DLRA Speedweek at Lake Gairdner with their 1927 Ford T roadster since 1998.

Bob, the car builder and crew chief, is backed up by Neil Jacups, the team bus driver, Ray Cook, Trevor May and Terry Maloney the team cook. Each year they haul their club bus from Newcastle to Lake Gairdner with the roadster on board for a fun filled week.

The roadster was originally powered by a 302 Ford Boss motor but nowadays gives Big Knob Racing a run for their money with a new 427 stroker Windsor. This year the guys were doing great with a 193mph pass, but then broke the steering at high speed!! That must have got the drivers attention.

Later Al exported the car to Australia and has raced it a number of times on Australian salt. This year Al let his mates Al Scott and Ian Leslie race the car. Although the salt conditions on the track were good, the crosswinds tested the drivers who both managed to go into high speed spins at the 4 mile marker.

Al Scott finished the week with a 206mph pass while Ian Leslie ran a 201.5. Al Fountain says there is still plenty left in her. Al is now onto another project, a belly tank, and has the tough little Studebaker up for sale - a good buy for someone who wants to get into salt lake racing.

Steve Morgan and John Viles



■ Steve Morgan and John Viles are both members of the Easy Street Rod Club on the central coast of NSW. After an eight month build, they rolled up to Speedweek 2009 with their 1985 Hilux powered by a Boss 302. They finished that week with a Modified Mini Pick Up record, running a speed of 152.654 mph. They have returned each year since with extra modifications and hopes of pushing the record higher but have had no success. This year Stephen ran the car at 150mph while John managed a speed of 137mph before breaking the diff. Undeterred, the guys say they have a fix for it and will be back next year.



Aaron Bradshaw, Greg White, Kevin Geoffries and Ron Hooks

■ Norm Bradshaw, DLRA president, has campaigned his taxi both in the USA and Australia. Club president at the DLRA's main event is a big job. Norm still wanted to have his Ford at Speedweek but running a race team and an event at the same time, he knew would be bloody hard, so he made his taxi available for his son Aaron and his mates Greg White, Kevin Geoffries and Ron Hooks to race. These guys had a ball driving Australia's fastest taxi. The car is powered by a 438 cubed Windsor with a Man of War block force fed by a massive turbo.

They each worked their way through the licences and each one of the guys achieved the big number and received their 200mph licence. Norm set aside some time to make a run determined to show the other fellows how to do it. He added dry ice to the turbo's in line esky, cooling the air as it fed into the intake. Norm says his speedo read 253mph before the 2 mile mark and he was on a killer run but he noticed fumes in the cabin and so had to abort and pull the chute.

Norm said the salt this year was the best he has ever driven on and he would like to thank everyone involved for their efforts in running a successful event.

Daryl Chalmers



■ Daryl Chalmers and his wife Sandra pack up the kids, Hailey and Jessica, into their converted bus, throw the race car on tow and head to Speedweek from Whittlesea in Victoria every year. The race car is an EF Falcon. Daryl currently holds the Australian D/production class record and this year he bumped up his own record to 214mph. Not bad for a 5 litre Windsor, but the motor is no ordinary small block Ford. Daryl's friends at Cylinder Head Innovations let him play with their engine dyno and Daryl found the little Windsor made 598hp.

Daryl is a good guy and a great mechanic. He screwed the beast together himself and the fact that it is only 11mph off the Bonneville record gives you an idea of this guy's skill.

Rumour has it that Animal (Steve Charlton, joint Race Director) got the OK from Daryl to take the Falcon for a run this year. Animal used to run an XA years back and so was looking forward to the experience. He had to do a bail out for the tech inspector to prove he could evacuate the car in a hurry, but there was a small problem, Animal couldn't get into the car. Daryl says the Ford Motor Co. must be making smaller doors and seats now than when Animal last raced his XA.

Next year the EF will return with a new intake, a taller diff ratio and more lift on the intake valves. Daryl expects this combo to give him the required 11mph and says his aim is to go faster than the Yanks.

Gary Satara

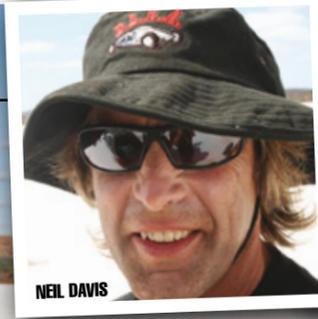
■ Gary Satara, with his 81 year old dad Boris, blew their 182 mph class record to pieces with a super fast 236.733 mph pass, making Gary and Boris' Jag the fastest Jag in the world. Boris was crew chief and push car driver. The car is a beautifully engineered XJS Jaguar that Gary purpose built for land speed racing. For 2016, Gary is planning to replace the current blown Cleveland with a twin turboed V12 Jag engine to get the big cat moving even faster. Gary said his dad felt like a teenager again and had a ball. They definitely made a good team.



Peter Hughes wanted to photograph his hot rod on the salt, so he drove his old school Model A all the way from Emerald in QLD to Lake Gairdner to do it, a round trip of around 4,500 kms. Top effort!



Big Knob Racing



■ Since Speedweek 2014 we had replaced every nut and bolt in the car, so we were confident in passing tech inspection without a problem. Mat Lagoon had found a crack in one of the pistons so the 429 was given a birthday, the gearbox had a rebuild after half the magnesium extension housing was found to be eaten away, and the front I beam and rear end were re-aligned.

We went to these measures because Neil managed to spin the roadster at 200+mph in 2014 and sandblasted salt into places that it has never been before. Mat keeps saying it's all Neil's fault!

Well, we thought we had replaced everything on the car. The inspection was going well until Bob Ellis, head tech inspector, pulled the chute to check it was in working order. The primary spring that drags the chute out of its bag broke in 3 places and fell limply onto the ground. WTF! How are we going to fix this? Where are we going to get a chute

from out here? Whose chute can we steal? After we calmed down and did some thinking, Neil with some copper wire, solder and race tape made the necessary repairs making the spring robust enough for Bob to pass the car. So after we got the big tick from Bob, we lined up to make a shake down pass. I took the roadster up around 200mph and found the motor was doing it easy, but the front end was a bit skatey. So I pulled the chute and went back to the pits for an adjustment to the wheel alignment.

I handed the roadster over to Mat Lagoon to chase the B Gas Modified record held by Bob Bowman and the guys from Rickshaws Hot Rod Club in Newcastle. Mat had to beat 178 mph which he did with a 186 mph pass, but then Bob Bowman in his next run pushed the record up to 193 mph! This was making things interesting. Mat decided to go for it on his next run. He managed 209 mph giving us a record and giving Mat a red hat and

membership of the 200 mph club – as long as Bowman didn't go faster than 209 for the rest of the meet, of course.

Bob and the Rickshaws guys took the car out again. Big Knob Racing were sweating, but the Bowman race car at high speed broke the steering and had to abort the run. Big Knob Racing remains the fastest hot rod in Australia for another year - but Bob said he'll be out there next year to change that!

Now it was Neil's turn. The Big Knob Racing roadster was changed to comply with the B Fuel Modified Roadster Class by changing the nose sheet metal. Neil and Mat compared notes and Neil decided to go for it with a repeat performance of Mat's run. The plan worked, Neil took the roadster up to 209mph giving him a class record and a red hat.

Big Knob Racing now has four Australian records in four different classes, all over 200 mph, and has given four drivers a red hat each.

Mat has been building our record breaking motors for years, including the destroyed 429 I drove at Bonneville USA at speeds over 200mph.

Mat now owns and operates Engine Action in Echuca where Big Knob Racing's latest big block Ford has just been given the once over. Mat has these motors singing - they will rev to 9 grand all day and gear changes happen anywhere over 7500 revs. We are running big bore with big valves using 780 lift and a short stroke fed by two 1200cfm Dominators.

Neil Davis is a well known hot rodder from Romsey in Victoria and has been a dedicated member of Big Knob Racing for 15 years, providing help with his Romsey Auto Electrical knowledge and his ability to fit in to tight spots where other team members can't.

This year was Mat and Neil's turn to run some big numbers and claim some records. Well done guys!

Rod Hadfield & Lionel West

■ The Bronze Aussie Race Team of Rod Hadfield and Lionel West race Australia's fastest Commodore at Speedweek. This year, Lionel drove one pass and ran a personal best of 273mph without using the on board nitrous oxide injection system. This run also ended up being the fastest speed of the meet.

Rod Hadfield, one of Australia's hot rod legends, is the only driver to have raced at all Australian Speedweek events since DLRA's inception in 1990, and he was planning, like all other Speedweek events, to make his mark at Speedweek 25. Rod took the 572 cubic inch car out, encouraged by Lionel's great no-nitrous run to do his best, maybe even nudge it to 300mph. Just as a side line, Rod would love to beat John Lynch's 301mph Bellytank record, the fastest run ever at Lake Gairdner, and he would love it even more if he could do it in a Commodore.

So that was the goal Rod set himself, but he noticed on his one and only run in 2015 that the Commodore was handling like a pig. Rod drove on and still hit the nitrous oxide at 250mph as planned but the motor laid down. The run had to be aborted. Back at the pits, the team found 4 spark plugs melted which explained the lack of power, and one of the rear tyres had gone from 100psi down to 20psi which explained the bad handling.

The team plans to pull down the motor and assess the damage in the next few weeks, hoping the motor can be saved for next year.

