

On the 29th of February, Big Knob Racing heads off to DLRA Speedweek in South Australia with our 1934 roadster in tow, hoping to go faster than the Yanks at Bonneville in our class. Our '34 roadster holds four Aussie records and has topped 200mph at Bonneville USA In 2010. Sounds good, but compare it to this...

I was standing at the start line at Bonneville SpeedWeek, looking back down the line, and there it was. No one could miss the outline of the toughest '34 roadster on the salt, the first 300 mph roadster. The closer you got, the tougher it looked. Check out the motor, the twin magnetos sticking out the bonnet, the grill, the rake - low as and slippery.

Taking a closer look, of course, that explains it, it's the 911. A 300+ mph short wheel based roadster. A current record holder at 301.150 mph, the Cummins - Beck - Davidson - Thornsbury '34 roadster hosts a blown fuel engine that guzzles 27 gallons of fuel over three miles! Dave Davidson, the driver explains, "We're only going to three miles, the main reason for that is the fuel consumption. We burn about 27-28 gallons of fuel in that three miles. The car is safe enough to go four miles, it's just that we don't have the fuel capacity." Then he adds, "We feel we can achieve what we want to achieve in three miles, we're basically full throttle at about three quarters of a mile. It's almost a drag race for us."

You see, the 911 is basically a funny car top fuel that's been detuned, so it's like driving a funny car for three miles - that's a little less than a minute of driving! Powered by a 495 ci Supercharged Keith Black dry engine equipped with Alan Johnson heads and running 72% Nitro mixed with alcohol, the 911 can boast to be the fastest roadster at El Mirage. Dave Davidson owns Vintage Hot Rod in Chico, California where the car was built. Engine builder John Beck runs the in house engine and dyno shop at Vintage Hot Rod and built the Keith Black with good quality parts, Dave reports. Over five passes, the team had gone through 140 gallons of Nitro. The motor was still running strong with no need to replace any parts - virtually unheard of with blown fuel engines. The success of the meet must have surprised the team too, because they had not brought that much Nitro with them and were borrowing Nitro from other teams.

The car is real heavy at 6200 lbs (2818 kgs) and with no suspension the down force goes directly to the tyres. They don't get a long life out of the rear tyres, usually only two passes at a good meet. On one of the five passes that 911 made at SpeedWeek 2011, it could not get traction and with 4000 to 5000 hp spinning the rear Bonneville slicks for three miles, they were shredded. These tyres are rated for speeds at over 500 mph and cost approx. \$1000 US each. Mate, I'd hate to pay the tyre bill ... or the Nitro bill for that matter!

Donny Cummins is co-crew chief with John Beck and works for RacePak Data Systems. Donny Cummins says the car runs a "RacePak Data Logger that monitors various items on the car including



"It's a fun ride to the three (3 mile marker), especially in a roadster with a short wheel base..."



engine functions, chassis functions and throttle inputs." Together with Dave's feedback on the feel of the car, this information helps the team tune the car between runs.

The starting procedure of this car is really something to see. Jerry Bermudez services the engine, is responsible for the wiring and inspects the car for safety. He takes us through the procedure...

"We have a starter that we put on the front of the snout. As we go to start it, I will spin the motor over, John Beck will pour gasoline down the butterflies and give Donny Cummins the signal to pull the rip cords. Once we get the motor running, we insert a hose supplying alcohol

RIGHT: Jerry Bermudez backs down the engine in preparation for the starting procedure, before he mounts the starter on the front of the snout.

BELOW: Jerry cranks over the motor, John Beck (centre) pours gasoline down the butterflies and Donny Cummins prepares to pull the rip cords (left).

BELOW RIGHT: These brand new Bonneville special rated tyres shredded after only one run! This is what 5000 hp over 3 miles with no traction does. Although the tyre delaminated, luckily it stayed inflated.



and switch it to alcohol. I will then remove the starter motor, and once the motor settles down, Dave is given the signal to switch the fuel on and then it's running on Nitro Methane. If it is to stall, we would have to back the engine down, get the fuel out of the motor and then start the procedure all over again. Everything is done in a sequence and John is in control."

So Jerry, why do you go through these steps? "Because it's safer, 'cause the Nitro is so volatile. If something goes wrong, the motor could detonate. Gasoline is not so volatile." Jerry explained.

And whose idea was it to build a 300 + mph roadster? Well, the team

had run roadsters and only roadsters for the past twenty years. Their previous roadster ran to 265 mph but the frame was too little to do what they wanted with the Chrysler engine. The 911 had been on the drawing board for the last 6 years - a 300 mph roadster.

"It's a fun ride to the three," (3 mile marker) Dave said, "especially in a roadster with a short wheel base. You don't do anything, you kind of let the car do what it wants to do." Good advice, I must remember that next time I'm driving a roadster at 300 mph.

See you on the salt,

Norm Hardinge.

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